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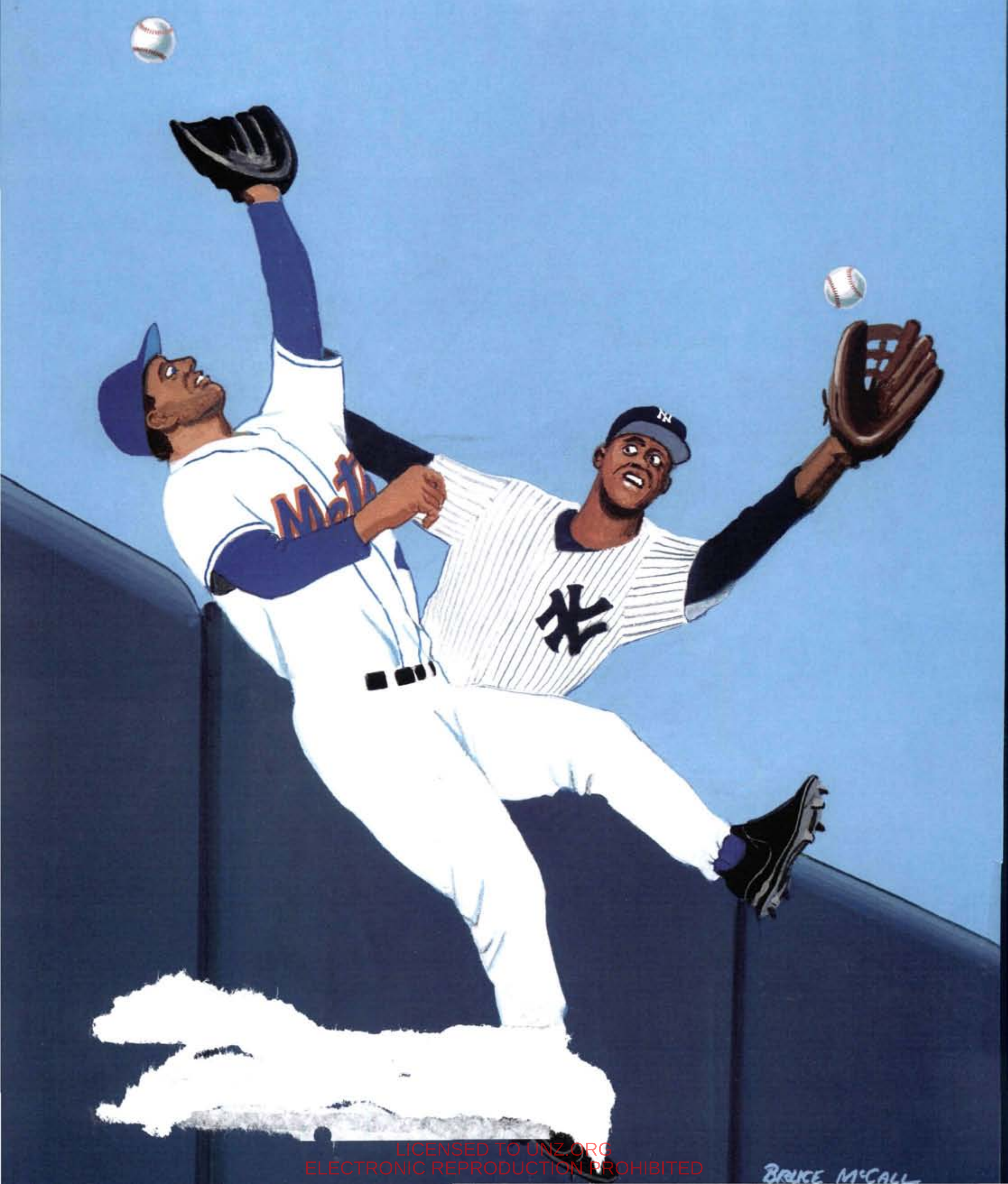
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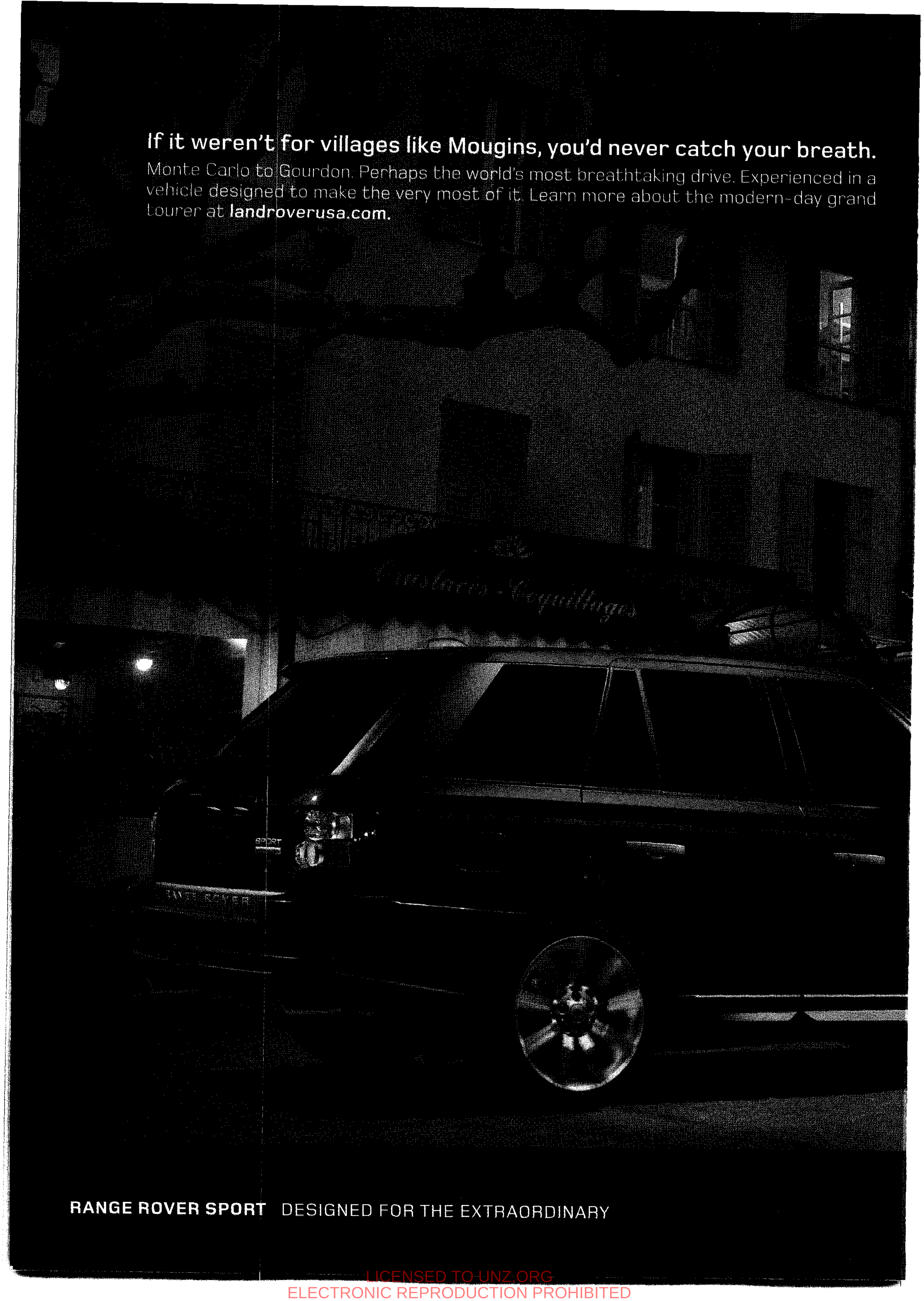

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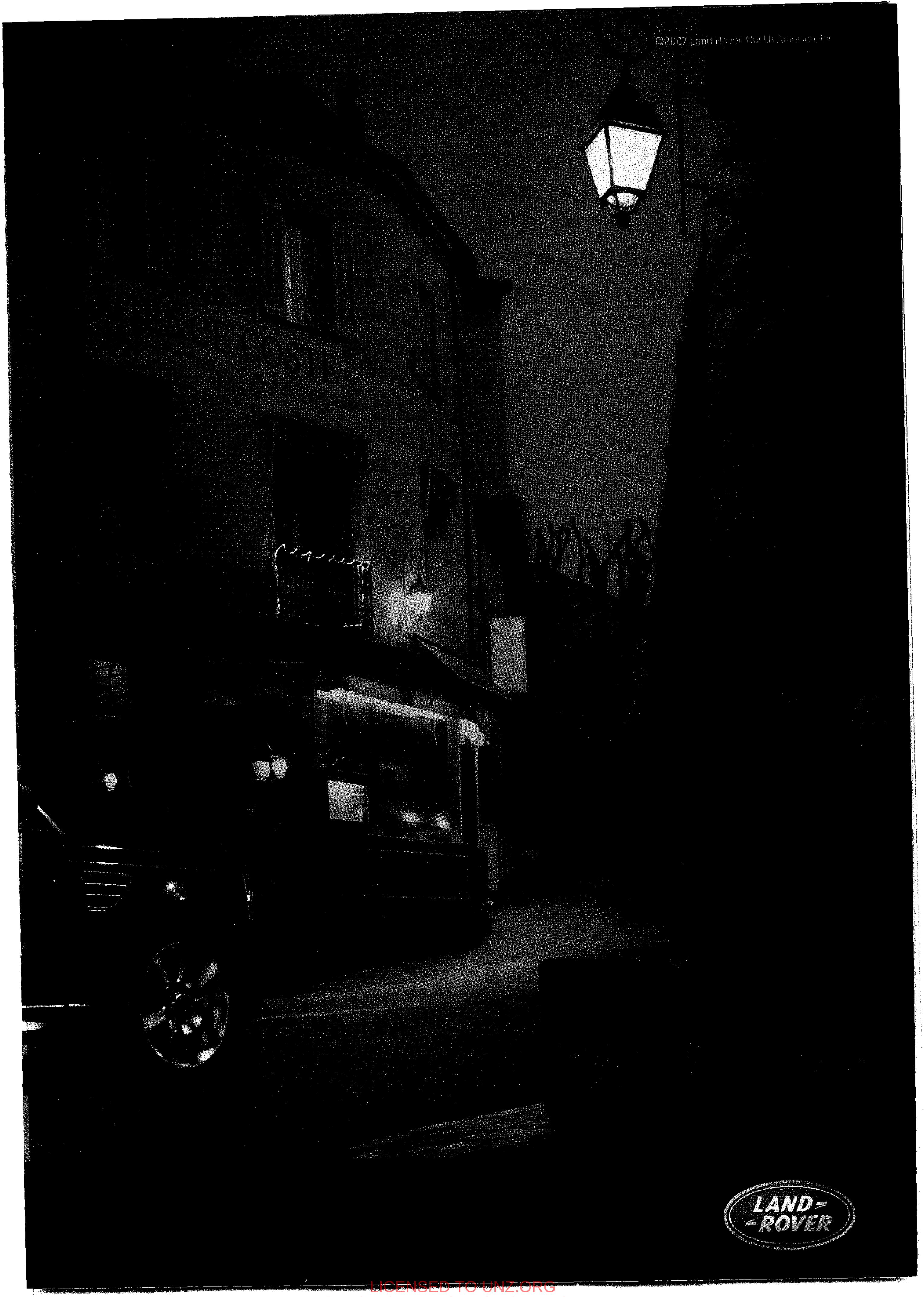

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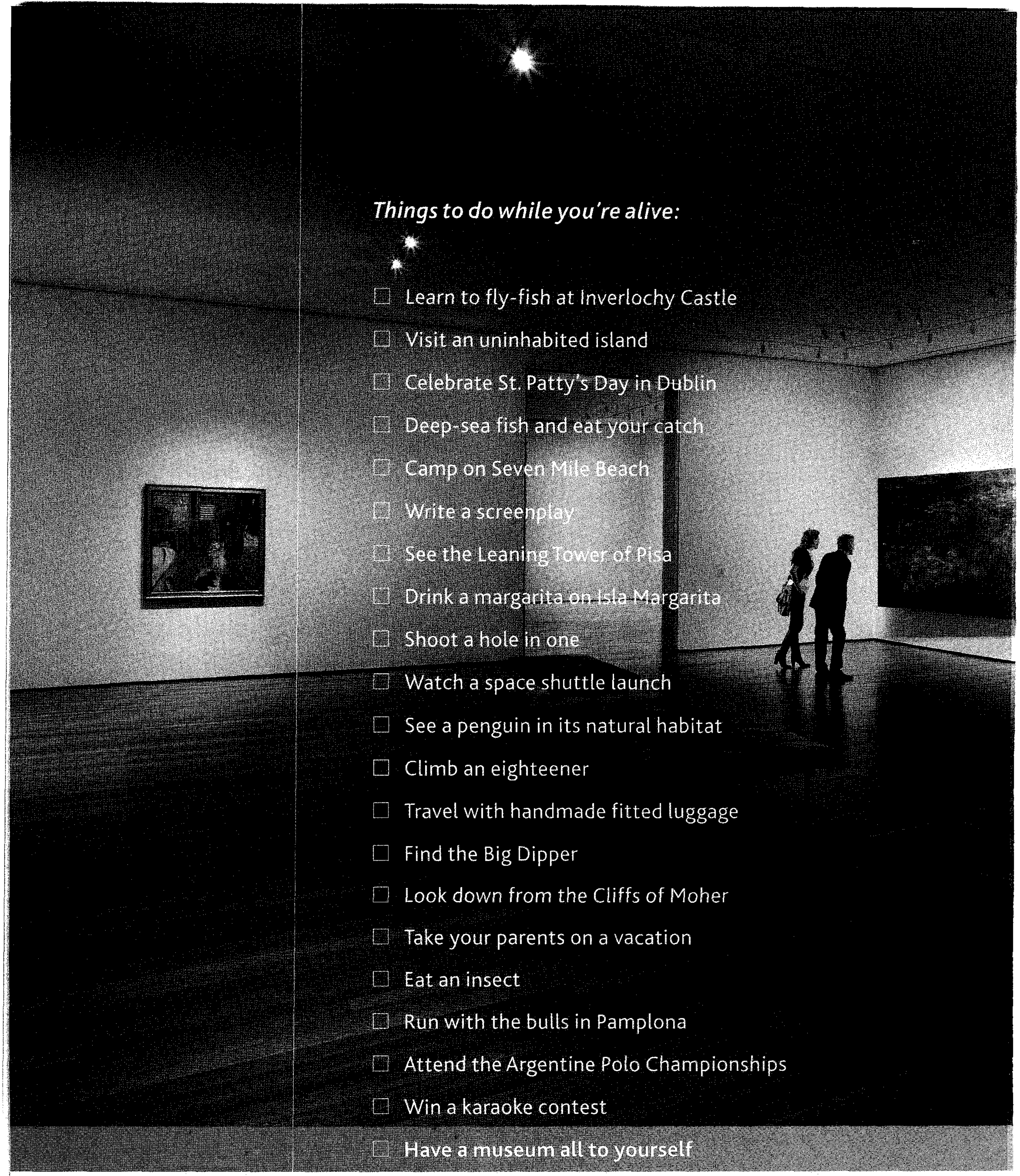

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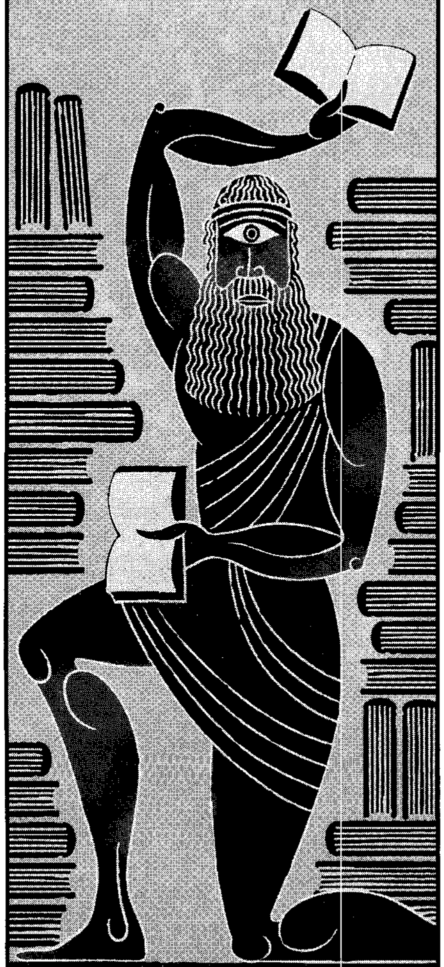

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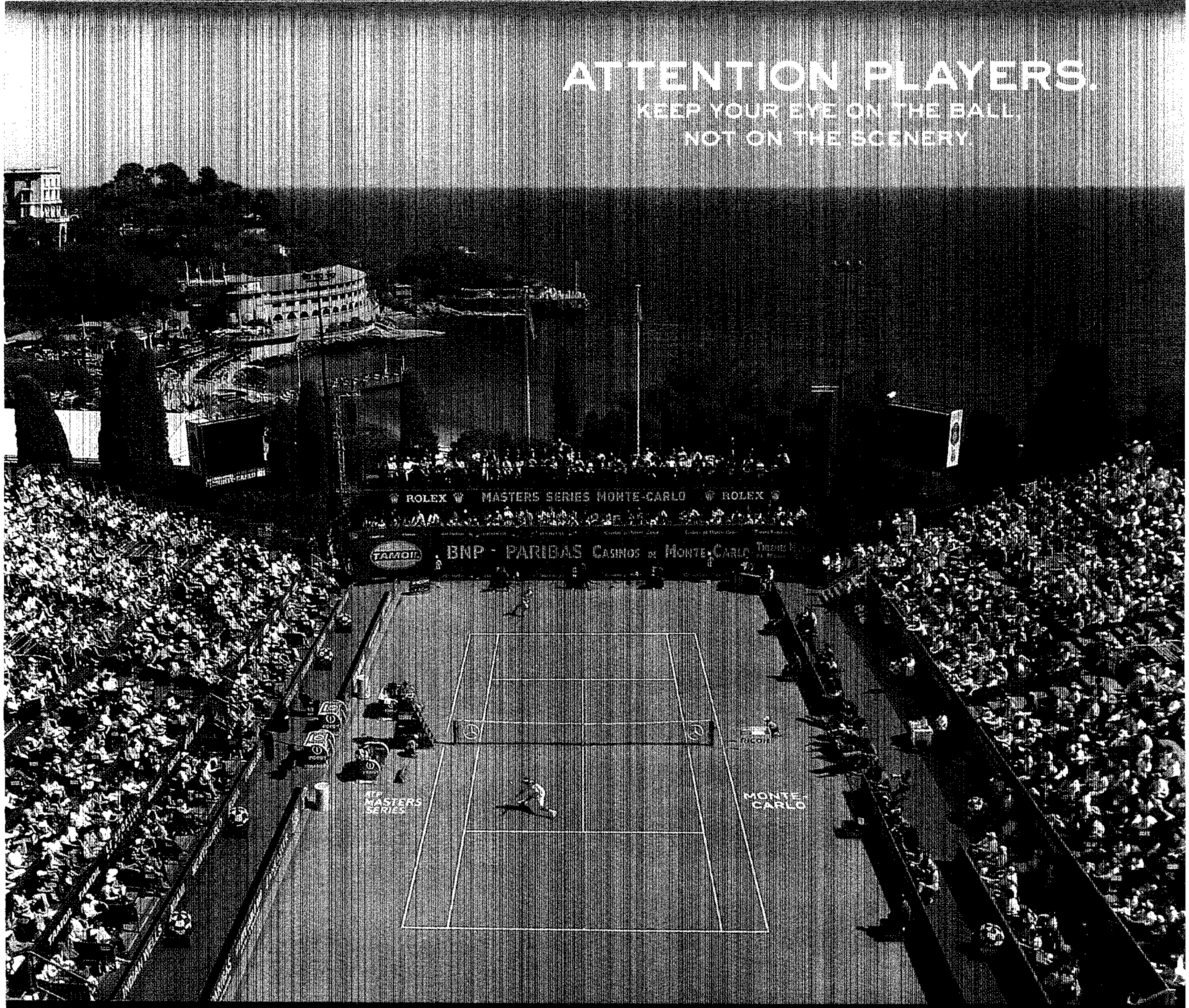
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Kramer ("The Pope and Islam," p. 58) writes the Letter from Europe for the magazine. Her books include "The Politics of Memory," a collection of essays on Germany.

Jeffrey Goldberg ("Selling Wal-Mart," p. 32), the magazine's Washington correspondent, recently published "Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East Divide."

Dorothy Wickenden (Comment, p. 25) is the executive editor of *The New Yorker*.

Adam Zagajewski (Poem, p. 44) is a poet, novelist, and essayist. His most recent collection of poems, "Without End," is available in paperback.

Arthur Phillips (Books, p. 80) is the author of "Prague" and "The Egyptologist." His third novel, "Angelica," was published this month.

Charles Wright (Poem, p. 54) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. "Littlefoot," a book-length poem, comes out in June.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 84) is the author of "Honky Tonk Parade: *New Yorker* Profiles of Show People."

Bill Buford ("The Taming of the Chef," p. 46) writes about food and drink for the magazine. "Heat," his book about his adventures in restaurant kitchens, came out last year.

Jill Lepore ("Our Town," p. 40) is a professor of history at Harvard. Her most recent book is "New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan."

Roddy Doyle (Fiction, p. 68) published a new novel, "Paula Spencer," in January.

John Updike (Books, p. 74) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. A collection of his essays and criticism, "Due Considerations," will come out this fall.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 86), the magazine's music critic, will publish his first book, "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," in October.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 88) is the author of "Great Books" and "American Sucker."

Bruce McCall (Cover), a regular contributor of art and humor pieces, will publish a children's book next spring.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
A slide show of portraits of Henry Kissinger, Norman Mailer, and others, by *Steve Pyke*. / *Dan Baum's* daily dispatches on the effort to rebuild New Orleans. / A video excerpt from *Lawrence Wright's* one-man show, "My Trip to Al-Qaeda." / From the archives: *Bill Buford's* Profile of Mario Batali, *Jane Kramer* on choosing the new Pope, and more. / A selection of articles from the current issue. / Video versions of animated cartoons; the caption contest; Q. & A.s, cover galleries, and other Web exclusives; and a calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country, on our redesigned Web site.

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THE MAIL

HONORING THE DEAD

Adam Gopnik, in writing on the fight over Anna Nicole Smith's body, states that "humans are still unique in having burial rituals for their fellows, or friends, or fashion models" (Comment, March 12th). While humans may have the distinction of burying their dead, other animals do display signs of mourning. Elephants, for example, repeatedly visit the skeletal remains of their dead, sometimes caressing the bones with their trunks, and in every way exhibit behavior that seems consistent with acknowledgment of and grieving for the death of loved ones. As far as I know, however, elephants don't refrigerate the bodies of the fallen and wrangle over their final resting place.

Katherine Burger
New York City

CINEMATIC DISORDER

David Denby refers to several of the key films in what some film theorists are beginning to refer to, however inaccurately, as "hyperlinked" films, or films that link various story lines with thin threads through time and space (A Critic at Large, March 5th). Denby is correct that this is not an entirely new form for film or any of the narrative arts, as anyone who has read William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" is aware. However, in crediting Quentin Tarantino as the modern progenitor of disordered narrative, Denby leaves out the work of the late Krzysztof Kieślowski. Beginning with "Decalogue," and especially in his Three Colors Trilogy, Kieślowski unfolds his separate and intertwined narratives over the course of three features, much as Alejandro González Iñárritu and Tarantino do in single films. Although each of Kieślowski's films can be watched separately, to do so would be to miss the layers of interconnectedness that, as Denby writes, create the sense that "all this is happening now, was always happening, will always be happening." "Blue" was released in 1993, while "White" and "Red" were both released in 1994, the same year as "Pulp Fiction." Tarantino was at the forefront of the emergence of this kind of cinema, but hardly the only director who was aware of its possibilities.

Stephanie Tuszynski
Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Theatre and Film
University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Louis Menand, in his review of "The Yale Book of Quotations," is right that the words Michael Douglas actually says in "Wall Street"—"Greed, for lack of a better word, is good"—are better without "for lack of a better word" (Books, February 19th & 26th). But it was the film's publicity, not the collective unconscious, that first elided the phrase. The reason people remember Douglas as saying "Greed is good" in the movie is that he said it in the trailer.

Eric McHenry
Seattle, Wash.

Menand laments the absence, in "The Yale Book of Quotations," of Virginia Woolf's "famous last sentence of 'To the Lighthouse' ('She had had her vision')." That line's inclusion would have been especially surprising, since Woolf actually ends her novel with Lily Briscoe thinking, "I have had my vision."

Jay Rogoff
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

EDITORS' NOTE: In "The Moneyed Muse" (February 19th & 26th), Dana Goodyear refers to submissions that she made to *Poetry* in 1998; a 2003 submission of hers should also have been mentioned.

•

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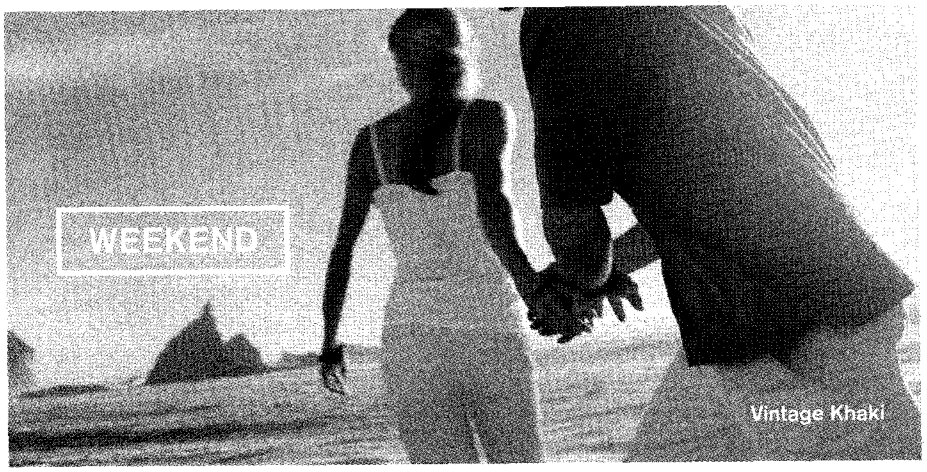
WORK
Legacy Khaki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Vintage Khaki

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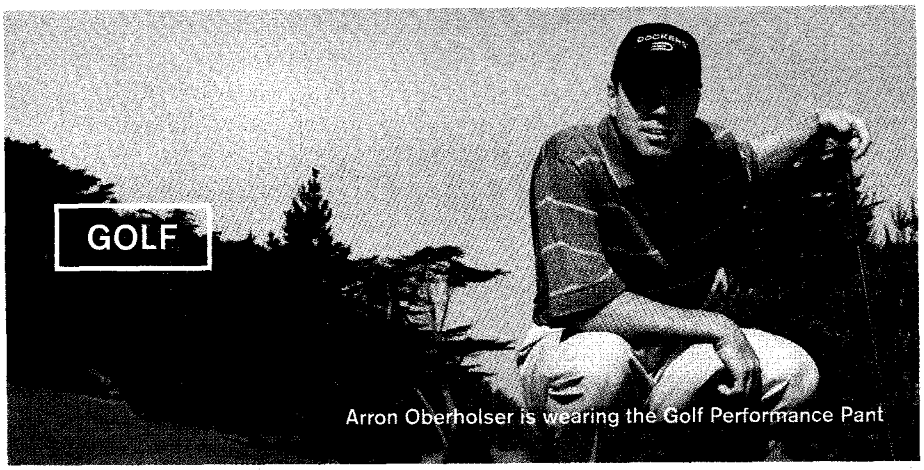
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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1	2	3	28	29	30	31

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
ON THE BUS

Vancouver's Axis Theatre Company returns to the New Victory with an updated production of "The Number 14," a satire about a miscellany of characters on a city bus which incorporates masks and movement. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
WEST COAST STYLE

The Slammin All-Body Band dispenses with instruments as it delivers funky grooves, jazz phrases, and pop hits (its repertoire includes songs by OutKast, Sly Stone, and Stevie Wonder). The Oakland-based sextet makes its first New York City appearance with a set at Joe's Pub. (See page 13.)

ART
FIGHTING FRANCO

In the nineteen-thirties, the Spanish Civil War captured the imagination of liberal New Yorkers with surprising force; it inspired Martha Graham to choreograph "Deep Song," Robert Motherwell and Philip Guston to make elegiac and protest paintings, and Gypsy Rose Lee to organize fund-raisers. The Museum of the City of New York's "Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War" looks at local activists as well as the history of the war. (See page 15.)

MOVIES
HELLO, MR. HULOT

Starring in his own films as Mr. Hulot, the old-fashioned Everyman who stubs his toe on modernity at every turn, Jacques Tati was the most original comedy director of the sound era. French Institute Alliance Française kicks off a complete retrospective of his features (including the restored version of the visionary "Playtime") and most of his short films. (See page 22.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND STRING THEORY

In today's overheated auctions scene, string instruments of fine pedigree are becoming increasingly desirable. A sale at Christie's on April 2 features a Stradivarius violin from 1729 and two guitars from the collection of the late country singer Merle Travis. (See page 23.)

"The Pirate Queen," a new Broadway musical. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

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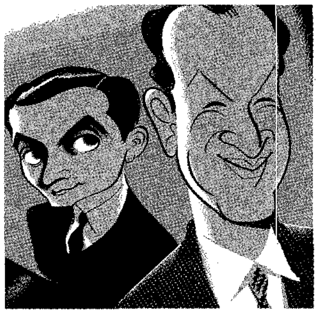
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BRINGING BACK BERLIN

Irving Berlin's musical "Face the Music" (1932) contended with the dip in Berlin's creative life as well as the dip in the economy. In an attempt to rally both himself and a Depression-weary society, he teamed up with the Broadway wunderkind Moss Hart to confect a political spoof like the Gershwins' "Of Thee I Sing," which the year before had brought new prestige and satirical range to the musical. "You not only write a show with Irving Berlin, you live it, breathe it, eat it, and, were it not for the fact that he allows you to sleep not at all, I should also say sleep it," Hart said. Their impudent satire snubbed its nose at monogamy ("I Don't Wanna Be Married, I Just Wanna Be Friends") and at anxiety ("I Say It's Spinach, and the Hell with It"). "Face the Music"—part of City Center's "Encores!" series, March 29-April 1—also provided one of the Depression's most buoyant anthems, "Let's Have Another Cup of Coffee," which managed to bring scarcity and levity into one enduring refrain: "Trouble's just a bubble / And the clouds will soon roll by / So let's have another cup o' coffee / And let's have another piece of pie."

—*John Lahr*



ERIC PALMA

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE ACCOMPLICES
Bernard Weinraub's drama, presented by the New Group, is about the revisionist Zionist Hillel Kook, who campaigned for the aid of European Jews during the Second World War. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ALL THE WRONG REASONS
John Fugelsang performs a one-man show, about drug smuggling, neo-Nazis, and his Catholic upbringing. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

BLACKBIRD
A play by David Harrower, starring Jeff Daniels and Alison Pill, about a young woman who shows up unexpectedly at the office of her former lover. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

DANCING WITH BISHOP
Saskia Hegt incorporates dance into her performance of selected poems and letters by the poet Elizabeth Bishop. Opens March 30. (La MaMa E.T.C., 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

ESSENTIAL SELF-DEFENSE
In Adam Rapp's new play, a human punching bag at a women's self-defense class helps a Midwestern town defeat a mysterious evil force. Carolyn Cantor directs. Opens March 28. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

EXITS AND ENTRANCES
Athol Fugard's play, presented by Primary Stages, traces the author's relationship with the South African actor André Huguenet. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

FACE THE MUSIC
Encores! presents a concert staging of the 1932 musical, by Irving Berlin and Moss Hart, with Judy Kaye, Walter Bobbie, and Lee Wilkof. Directed by John Rando. March 29-April 1. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

INHERIT THE WIND
Christopher Plummer and Brian Dennehy star in Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's dramatic retelling of the Scopes trial. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL
A musical adaptation of the Reese Witherspoon film, about a sorority girl who ends up at Harvard Law School. Directed and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. Previews begin April 3. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

LA MAGNANI
Theresa Gambacorta wrote and performs this dramatic portrait of the Italian film star Anna Magnani. In previews. Opens March 29. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-279-4200.)

MATTHEW PASSION
Phil Hall's play with music conflates the stories of Jesus, Matthew Shepard, and a middle-aged man living with H.I.V. Previews begin March 29. Opens April 2. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
The Old Vic's revival of Eugene O'Neill's romantic drama comes to Broadway, with Eve Best and Kevin Spacey. Howard Davies directs. Previews begin March 29. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE NUMBER 14
The Vancouver-based Axis Theatre Company brings back its popular physical-theatre show, told with masks and clowning, about the passengers on a city bus. Opens March 30. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PIRATE QUEEN
A new musical by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg ("Les Misérables"), based on the story of the sixteenth-century Irish chieftain Grace O'Malley. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

REARVIEWMIRROR
Carl Forsman directs a play by Eric Winick, about rock-and-roll fans looking for spiritual fulfillment. Previews begin March 31. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SERENDIB
David Zellnik's play about a group of filmmakers making a documentary about a team of scientists. Part of the "First Light" festival, which focusses on science-themed plays. Previews begin March 28. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING
Vanessa Redgrave stars in Joan Didion's stage adaptation of her memoir, a reflection on grief and survival, written after the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne. David Hare directs. In previews. Opens March 29. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

BLINDNESS
A doctor's wife is the only person who can see in a town plagued by sightlessness, in Joe Tantalo's adaptation of a novel by the Nobel laureate José Saramago. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE CAVE DWELLERS
William Saroyan's 1957 drama is about a group of outcasts who create a second home in a run-down theatre. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

CURTAINS
David Hyde Pierce plays a show-loving detective in a new musical murder mystery by John Kander and the late Fred Ebb. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
The men and even the young boys are all sharpened to flint by the ongoing struggle being waged over Northern Ireland's fate, in Stuart Carolan's forceful drama set in 1986. Ciarán O'Reilly directs a uniformly excellent ensemble cast in this tale of a gruff farmer (the fine Anto Nolan) and his two remaining sons, Thomas (Luke Kirby) and young Danny (the eldest boy, Seamey, is dead, and their mother is confined in a mental hospital). Stuck together on a farm in South Armagh—on the border between north and south—the characters are passionately pro-I.R.A., and all are on the lookout for the informant in their midst. O'Reilly's vigorous cast keeps the hard-driving plot flowing. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

THE EXILES
The director Theodora Skipitares uses masks, video, and Bunraku puppetry in this retelling of the Orestes and Electra myth. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

FUGUE
Judith Ivey directs a comedic drama by Lee Thuna, about a woman with amnesia and a doctor running away from his past. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

INTRÍNGULIS
LAByrinth Theatre Company presents a solo show by Carlo Alban, an Ecuadorian immigrant who portrays a menagerie of characters. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

JACK GOES BOATING
LAByrinth Theatre Company stages a play by Bob Glaudini, about dating, drugs, and betrayal. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

OUR LEADING LADY
A few years ago, Charles Busch gave the Manhattan Theatre Club a hit with "The Tale of the Allergist's Wife"; the theatre repays the favor by mounting Busch's woeful seriocomic attempt to speculate about the play being performed on the night President Lincoln was shot. Part farce, part melodrama, and all fiasco, the play offers no insight into history, character, or stagecraft. Lynne Meadow directs. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

PROMETHEUS BOUND
The five-woman chorus claims the front of Classic Stage Company's intimate square of a stage, ap-

pearing birdlike one moment and plaintively human the next. They provide the tender counterpoint to the eloquent defiance of David Oyelowo as Prometheus, the fire stealer. The youthful, round-faced Oyelowo looks like a crucified Christ, bound to a swinging tether with arms outstretched. When outcast Io (Julie McNiven) comes to tell him about her seduction by Zeus and her wandering exile, she curls up at his feet, sheltered for a moment there, and the contrast between the two figures gives the scene a jagged power. In this lucid translation, conceived by the director, James Kerr, Aeschylus' tragedy has an undeniable force. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SOME MEN
Terrence McNally's new play follows the reminiscences of the guests at a gay wedding. Directed by Trip Cullman. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STAY
The première of Lucy Thurber's story of a young writer who discovers an angel. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

TALK RADIO
In the current revival of Eric Bogosian's 1987 play (under the direction of Robert Falls), Liev Schreiber plays Barry Champlain, a late-night call-in-show host at a small Cleveland radio station who, once he takes his seat, can't keep his vitriol to himself. Barry has plenty of language, but no words that can actually describe the pain he's in. Bogosian has given Linda, Barry's occasional girlfriend who works at the studio (Stephanie March), and Stu, his producer (solidly played by Michael Laurence), decent soliloquies in which they describe the love and disappointment they feel for this small-time star with a big-league neurosis, but it's Schreiber's gravel-voiced outrage that captivates us and binds all the characters together. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/26/07.) (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

TALL GRASS
A triptych of dark comedic vignettes about relationships, by Brian Harris. Directed by Nick Corley. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW / TWELFTH NIGHT
The all-male British troupe Propeller presents both Shakespeare comedies in repertory. Edward Hall directs. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through April 1.)

TEA AND SYMPATHY
The reasons for mounting the current revival of Robert Anderson's once shocking 1953 play, about a troubled gay prep-school student, are dim. Still, it is wonderfully directed by Jonathan Silverstein and, for the most part, well acted. As Laura Reynolds, the understanding wife of a homophobic housemaster, Heidi Armbruster is especially fine, and Dan McCabe is singularly arresting as Tom Lee, the much maligned, sensitive student whom Laura eventually falls for—using his lanky frame and often squeaky voice to convey the minefield that is adolescence, he reminds one of the early Dustin Hoffman. (3/26/07) (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

AT LEAST IT'S PINK: Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444. Through April 1. **CHICKEN:** Studio Dante, 257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HOWARD KATZ:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **JOURNEY'S END:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **KING HEDLEY II:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **MY TRIP TO AL-QAEDA:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. **PRELUDE TO A KISS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-7171. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—March 29: **Marta Topferova,** a Prague-born songwriter with a sultry voice who's lived in New York since 1996, displays a deep passion for Spanish, Cuban, and Latin-American music. She accompanies herself on a *cuatro* as she sings original songs in Spanish, as well as material previously performed by the Argentinean luminaries Mercedes Sosa and Atahualpa Yupanqui. She toured extensively last year after the release of her fourth album, "Flor Nocturna," and now she's appearing with the bassist Pedro Giraudo and the flutist Yulia Musayelyan.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 30: **Doc Watson,** one of the most important fingerpicking stylists of all time, pioneered the craft of playing old-time mountain fiddle songs on his flattop guitar. Joining Watson here are his grandson **Richard Watson** on guitar and his longtime friend and collaborator **David Holt,** a banjo virtuoso (and the host of the "Folkways" show, on public television, as well as Public Radio International's "Riverwalk: Classic Jazz from the Landing") who has spent the past three decades gathering music and tales from the Blue Ridge Mountains.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—March 30-31 and April 2-3: The **Allman Brothers** continue their annual multi-night spring stand.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 30-31: **LCD Soundsystem,** the work of the proud music geek James Murphy, traffics in surprisingly tender dance rock. April 2: **Albert Hammond Jr.,** the son of the singer-songwriter Albert Hammond, first gained attention as the corkscrew-haired guitarist for those dressed-down Manhattanites the Strokes. It turns out that Albert, Jr., is a songwriter in his own right; he's penned a few numbers for the Strokes, and he recently crafted a full L.P. of material. His début, "Yours to Keep" (featuring cameos from Sean Lennon, Ben Kweller, and the odd fellow-member of the Strokes), is a light, sunny affair. April 3: The New York City rockers **Battles** refract a hardcore sound through a slide rule.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 31: **Mudville,** featuring the smoldering vocalist Marilyn Carino and the producer, bassist, and multi-instrumentalist Ben Rubin, delivers thick beats and haunted-matinée-style organ playing. For this late-night set, they'll be joined by the bassist Mike Mills, of R.E.M., and other guests from their new album, "Iris Nova."

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 371 W. 16th St. (866-468-7619)—March 30: **Dean & Britta,** a remnant of the glorious tapestry that was the indie-rock group Luna. Dean Wareham, the male half of this duo, once fronted Luna; Britta Phillips is his wife and that band's former bassist. Together, they dabble in relaxed late-night-listening music.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 30: The **Slammin All-Body Band**—four a-cappella singers, a human beat-boxer, and a body percussionist—makes its New York City début. With the blues and gospel stylings of **Kemp Harris.** April 1: **Alessandra Belloni,** a New York-based Neapolitan singer, performer, and tambourine designer, celebrates the release of her new book and DVD, "Rhythm Is the Cure."

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 27-28: British humor and weirdness coalesce in the performances of **Robyn Hitchcock.** March 30: The long-running Italian rock band **Afterhours,** which performs in both English and Italian, counts Greg Dulli, formerly of the Afghan Whigs, among its fans. He produced its latest album, "Ballads for Little Hyenas." April 2: **Aereogramme,** an earnest Scottish band with grand ambitions, performs songs from its new record, "My Heart Has a Wish That You Would Not Go."

TABLES FOR TWO
SRIPRAPHAI

64-13 Thirty-ninth Ave., between 64th and 65th Sts., Woodside (718-899-9599)—Sripraphai could be said to be the restaurant that Chowhound, the Web bulletin board frequented by intrepid food hunters, built. When the site started up, in 1997, the place was a thirty-five-seat hole in the wall. Chowhounders—who, by disposition, relish a foray into Queens—began posting about it, restaurant reviewers arrived, and soon lots of people were venturing that this might be the best Thai food in the city. Sripraphai quadrupled in size and ditched its fluorescent lighting and Formica tabletops. Nonetheless, between the vertical blinds, the lime-green walls, and the muted TV game show playing in the background, the place hasn't quite mastered atmosphere—but atmosphere was never the point. On a Saturday night, the crush inside the door always seems to include at least one patron studying the menu with the nervous intensity usually devoted to an exam—pencilling in choices, erasing, and pencilling in some more.

The hundred-and-twenty-nine-dish menu is long enough to be paralyzing, and can be perilously unpredictable. Request something not too hot, and it may prove spicy enough to trigger not only euphoria but also sweat and tears and intestinal corrosion. Then again, you may wind up with something—green curry, say, or drunken noodles—no spicier than the stuff from your local takeout place. Better to take things as they come. A special northern-Thai-style curry dish combines a fiery red sauce, evocative of Burmese curry, with ground pork, spareribs, and rice noodles; the *tom yum* pork-leg broth, once you get past the huge, glistening lobes of pork fat, proves to be delicately sour and peppery. The meat salads are so superb, with their interplay of heat and chill, that you might happily construct a whole meal from them. The roasted-duck salad is particularly revelatory, its luscious slices of meat immersed in a riot of flavors, including cilantro, mint, lime juice, and slivers of spicy red peppers. Like the best of Sripraphai's offerings, it wallops the sweet, peanut-heavy version you'd find elsewhere.

For dessert, you're encouraged to choose something to take home out of the refrigerated cases by the front door, where you find, along with various other culinary souvenirs, an array of prepackaged custards, puddings, marzipan, and preserved bananas. With some prodding, the waitress, on a recent evening, eventually produced a bowl of *tab tim crob*—coconut milk punctuated with ice and jewel-colored tapioca candies, each with a mysterious crunch. "Water chestnuts!" she said, with a wide smile. On second thought, maybe some custard to go. (Open Thursdays through Tuesdays for lunch and dinner. Entrées $7.50-$17.50.)

—*Kate Julian*

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—March 28: **Spielerfrau,** a highly literate and slightly suave Brooklyn-based pop quintet, is the brainchild of the Russian musician and journalist Michael Idov (he moonlights as a staff writer for *New York* magazine). Idov's sophisticated and sometimes ironic lyrics take on everything from pheromones to Vladimir Putin's repressive presidency. Their new record, "Do the Stalinistka," features a darkly funny anti-Putin title track that loosely mirrors "The Hokey Pokey" and is generating a good deal of buzz in Russia.

UNITED PALACE
4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (212-307-7171)—March 30-31: Two years ago, **Bloc Party** was plagued by comparisons to old-school stalwarts like Gang of Four (not least because of its penchant for plaintive vocals and angular guitars). The London band has switched up its game for its second CD, "A Weekend in the City," and bulked up its sound with a comparatively lush orchestration.

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—March 30: The Malian kora master **Toumani Diabaté** and his highly polished Symmetric Orchestra give a taste of the sharp grooves that have filled his weekly all-night sets in Bamako over the past decade.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 28-31: Taking a break from his celebrated big band, the trumpeter **Charles Tolliver** leads a quintet with the saxophonist **Billy Harper,** the pianist **George Cables,** the drummer **Victor Lewis,** and the bassists **Dwayne Burno** (on the first and last nights) and **Christian McBride** (on March 29 and March 30).

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 27-April 1: A performance by **James Moody** is an example of living history. To celebrate his eighty-second birthday, the brilliant saxophone and flute stylist will be joined by the equally legendary and comparably witty octogenarian brass man **Clark Terry.**

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through March 31: The singer **Jane Monheit,** whose new album, "Surrender," concentrates on bossa nova and light-textured standards.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—March 28-April 1: The saxophonist **Houston Person** had a long and fruitful partnership with the late Etta Jones, leaving him well prepared to work with other vocalists. Here he'll be joined by **Ernestine Anderson,** a seasoned performer who deserves wider acclaim.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—March 27-April 7: The big, unabashed voice of **Betty Buckley.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 29-April 1: The saxophonist **Anthony Braxton** has been a genre unto himself for so long that the omnivorously inclusive gadfly shouldn't be surprising to us anymore, and yet he always is. Leave all stylistic expectations at the door. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

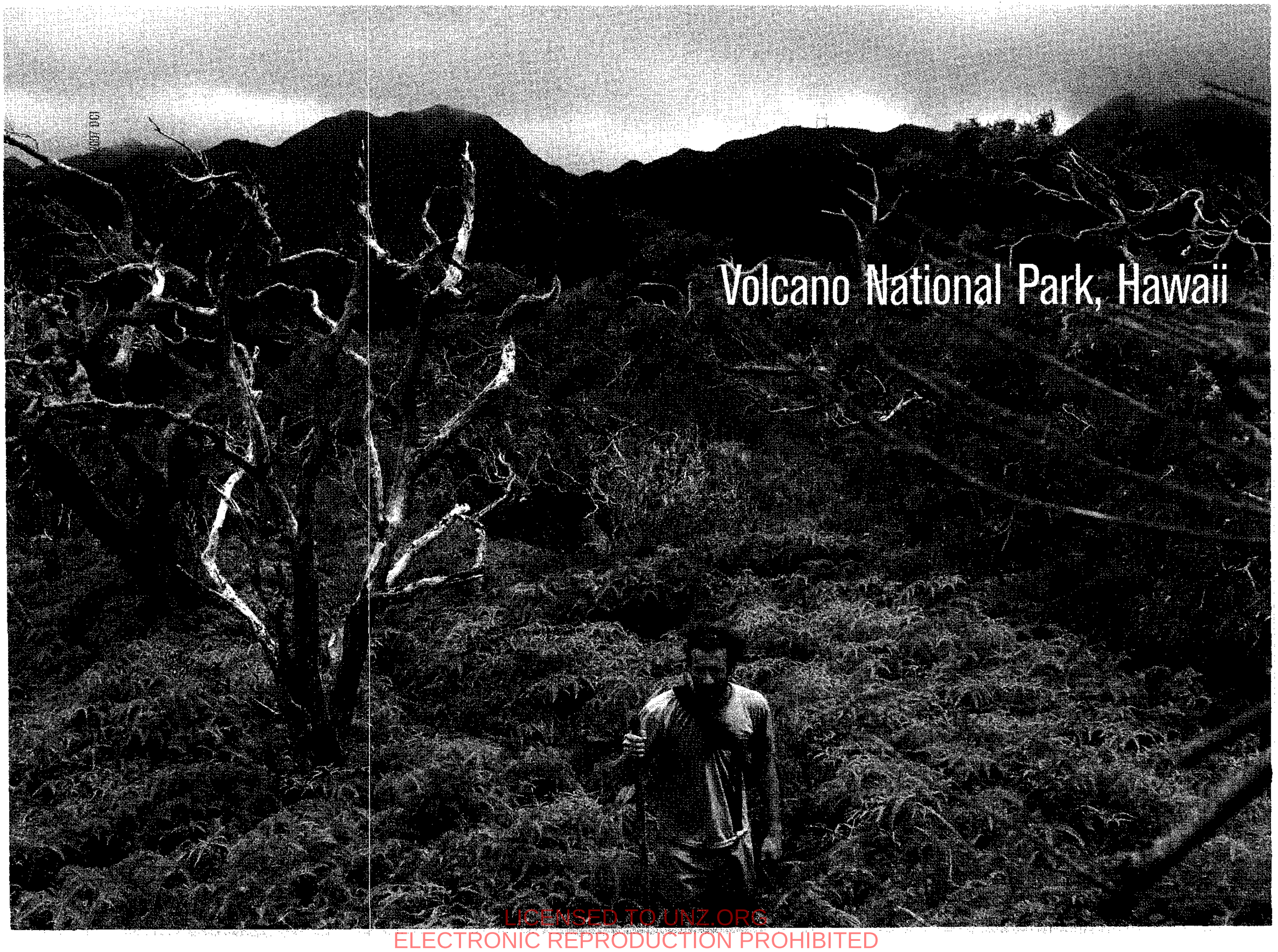
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—March 29-31, in the Rose Theatre: The **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra** focusses on popular standards. March 30-31, in the Allen Room: **Bill Charlap,** the premier mainstream pianist of his generation, leads his polished trio in an overview of cool jazz, touching on compositions associated with Lester Young, Gerry Mulligan, Miles Davis, and others. His guests include the trumpeter **Warren Vaché,** the saxophonist **Frank Wess,** and the vocalist **Mary Stallings.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 31-April 1: The **Bennie Maupin Ensemble.** If a sideman hall of fame is ever established, the saxophone and bass-clarinet virtuoso Maupin will find himself among its honorees; his outstanding work on recordings by Lee Morgan, Miles Davis, and Herbie Hancock still impresses. Maupin's latest album, "Penumbra," his first in eight years, is a welcome comeback.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 27-April 1: **Michael Weiss,** a forthright bop pianist who has paid his dues since the early eighties supporting such heavyweights as Johnny Griffin and Charles McPherson, now leads his own hard-swinging quintet. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797"** and **"Europe and the Islamic World: Prints, Drawings, and Books"** both open March 27. ♦ **"Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Flowing Streams: Scenes from Japanese Art and Life."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."**



Through May 20. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"Accordions and Harmonicas of the Nineteenth Century."** Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Armando Reverón"** is a beguiling retrospective of a Venezuelan painter, hardly known in North America, who died in 1954, at the age of sixty-five. Through April 16. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing."** Works on paper that relate to performance-art pieces. Through May 21. ♦ **"Jeff Wall,"** a mid-career survey of the Canadian photographer's work. Through May 14. ♦ **"Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking."** Through June 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory."** Through March 28. ♦ **"The Hugo Boss Prize 2006: Tacita Dean."** Through June 6. ♦ **"Family Pictures"** showcases contemporary photography and video depicting families and children; among the artists included are Patty Chang, Loretta Lux, Sally Mann, Gregory Crewdson, Gillian Wearing, and Thomas Struth. Through April 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

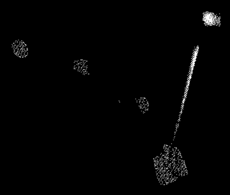
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Lorna Simpson."** Through May 6. ♦ Terence Koh's one-room work comprises a single four-thousand-watt bulb in a lamp pointed at viewers, a withering assault on the senses. Through May 27. ♦ **"Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar."** Through June 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-368-5900)—With its old-school swank and ghost-town emptiness, the American Academy campus is worth a visit on its own merits. The annual **Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts,** installed for just a few weeks, provides an additional impetus. Two gracious, light-filled galleries house traditional still-lifes and portraits mixed with wild cards like Charlotte Becket's "Wishing Well" (a pile of motorized recyclables) and Joe Fig's perfect doll-house replicas of artists' studios. Standouts include a big painting by Dana Schutz that manages to be both watery and electric and an installation by Sarah Oppenheimer that mingles fine cabinetry with spaceship aesthetics. Be forewarned: the buildings are open only from 1 to 4, Thursday through Sunday. Through April 1.

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—For **"Levity: Selections Spring 2007,"** fourteen participants selected from the Drawing Center's artist registry liberate drawing from gravity, in one sense or another. Lisa Perez's paper cutouts hover on the walls, like clustering spores; Norma-Jean Bothmer's vivid blue drawings of her Teddy bear resist solemnity. Light is the "pencil" that creates the images in Bill Gerhard's geometric works, purple sheets of construction paper strategically exposed to sunlight. Colored pencils are unleashed in Michelle Oosterbaan's large-scale drawings, which blend abstract elements with carefully rendered trees. Esteban Alvarez's video of his cat making a "drawing" with string extends the dialogue to include quadrupedal practitioners. Through March 31. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!"** Through April 29. ♦ **"Henri Cartier-Bresson's Scrapbook: Photographs, 1932-46."** Any glimpse into an artist's working method is valuable, and a photographer's contact sheets are especially fascinating to anyone curious about the crucial editing process. The tiny images in Cartier-Bresson's "Scrapbook," compiled just after the war, when a MOMA exhibition was in the works, are the next best thing. Included here, alongside wallet-size versions of many of C.-B.'s most famous images, are the shots that came just before or after that "decisive" moment. The temptation to second-guess the Master is strong, but he had an unerring sense of when "everything [was] in the right place" (as he puts it in a short film here), and this engrossing show is proof of that. Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War."** Through Aug. 12. ♦ **"Robert Moses and the Modern City: Remaking the Metropolis."** Through May 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)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GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

ANRI SALA
A quartet of recent projects from the fast-rising Albanian video artist. In "Overthinking," Sala seeks the help of a psychic to determine the thoughts of a dead artist; sitting at a patio table on a blustery day, the medium offers generalizations that are more or less useless in assessing the question at hand. On the largest screen, the saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc serenades Berlin from an apartment building that locals call Long Sorrow; the camera creeps up on him as though it were afraid of startling him, and one realizes that Moondoc is on the outside of a window several stories above the trees. In two witty smaller pieces, Sala freezes and tatters a moment in a tennis match, and tools around a truck stop to strains of Baroque music. Sala has said that his Long Sorrow piece is about "feeling through perception, not through logic or knowledge," a description that one could apply equally well to any of the evocative works here. Through March 31. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

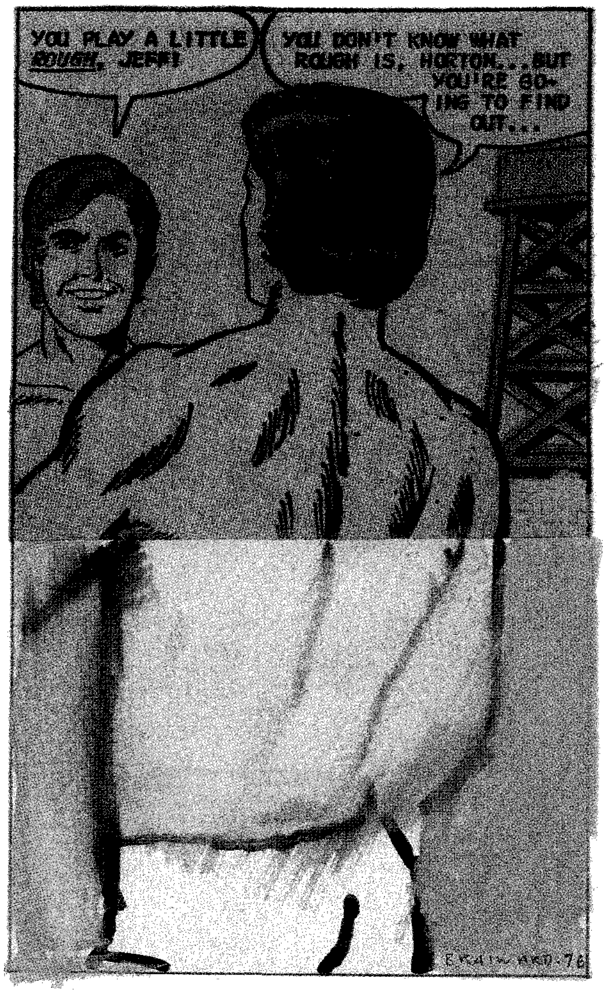
PAUL STRAND
It's hard to imagine Strand, the great pioneering modernist photographer, inspiring contemporary photographers. Even his most groundbreaking work tends to look conservative and fatally earnest today. But there are also depths of pleasure in Strand's precision and restraint, and both are much in evidence in this survey of small, flawless vintage prints from the nineteen-forties and fifties. The focus here is on three series devoted to small-town life in New England, France, and Italy, each of which includes portraits, architectural studies, and landscapes. While hardly effortless, the images have exactly the sort of weight, grace, and humanity missing from the current scene. Through March 31. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

JACK TWORKOV
A small survey of paintings and drawings in watercolor and charcoal, spanning the late fifties and the sixties. Hints of de Kooning and Kline, with whom Tworkov rubbed shoulders at the New York School artists' collective The Club, flit through the work. But there are also cooler, more systematic or minimalist-inflected paintings, like "Idling" (1969), where a rhythmic, rain-like gray pattern covers the canvas. Tworkov's other influences were John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, and the mix of poise and agitation in his gestures epitomizes the visual code of those heady Cedar Tavern/Five Spot days. Through March 30. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave. 212-721-5350.)

JEFF WALL
The biggest photograph in this show of ten new backlit transparencies is also the newest piece in MOMA's shrewdly edited Wall retrospective. "In Front of a Nightclub," a crowded street scene full of milling figures, is fitfully engaging but fairly unremarkable, save for its scale and the fact that it took the artist a year to make. Needless to say, this investment of time and effort redefines the photograph as most of us understand it, but, if Wall is not capable of simply taking a picture, he seems more inclined these days to leaven his shows with smaller and more modest works. (Seemingly) straightforward pictures of a scruffy back-yard garden, a cobwebbed window, and an ancient stone water fountain provide some relief from his obsessively rejiggered reality. Through March 31. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

Short List

JOSEPH BEUYS: Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through March 31. **JOE BRAINARD:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through April 14. **ROBERT RYMAN:** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through April 7. **PHILIP TAAFFE:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through March 31.


YOU PLAY A LITTLE ROUGH, JEFF!
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT ROUGH IS, HORTON... BUT YOU'RE GOING TO FIND OUT...
BRAINARD-76

Joe Brainard's "You Play a Little Rough," at de Nagy.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JOSÉ BEDIA
A small survey of paintings and works on paper made between 1992 and 2006 by the Cuban artist Bedia, who has lived in this country since 1993. A consistent family of symbols links the works: cavorting, silhouetted imps; lumbering mythological animals; aircraft carriers; planes. Goya-like captions reference Bedia's interest in Lakota Sioux and Yoruban cosmologies, along with elegies for his wife and warnings about the oil economy. Curiously, the mournings and the warnings take as their icon the aircraft carrier. One ship, bearing down head-on, is called the Cassandra—Bedia understands that the admonition will go unheeded. Through March 31. (Adams, 525 W. 26th St. 212-564-8480.)

BARRY FLANAGAN
Flanagan's bronze hares are like contemporary-art versions of Bugs Bunny: wisecracking, playful characters who thumb their whiskered noses at anything that takes itself too seriously. There are "Acrobats" and "Handshakers," a klutzy "Hare with a Broken Vase" and hares dancing on top of Empire State Buildings. One leaps over a bronze wheel-and-stool ensemble, in flying homage to Duchamp. The cagey energy of these sculptures is set free in "Large Left-Handed Drummer," in the southeast traffic island of Union Square Park, a temporary monument (up until summer) to those who feel slightly out of step with the rest of the world, or speak, as Flanagan puts it, from "the other side of the brain." Through March 31. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave. 212-563-4474.)

JUSTINE KURLAND
Kurland's lovingly staged back-to-nature photographs started out as teen-age escape fantasies—expansive pictures of girls on the run, creating their own brave new world. But now that the thirty-seven-year-old photographer is a mother her concerns have shifted, and her new series, "Of Women Born," focusses on women and their young children in Edenic American landscapes. In Kurland's paradise, everyone is casually, comfortably naked, but with as many as twenty-eight figures gathered on a rocky shore, by a mountain stream, or in a pine forest, the scenes can be a little hectic. Although her best pictures evoke nineteenth-century masters like Timothy O'Sullivan and Albert Bierstadt, mothers and babies are often reduced to tiny, incidental bits of data in magnificent vistas. Through April 7. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

"QUOTIDIAN"
There's a common sensibility running through this show, and it's not just a reliance on everyday objects or "quotidian" materials. It's an insouciant approach to art-making—Duchampian in origin, obviously, with nods toward Rauschenberg—resulting in objects that look neither labored nor precious. Mike Quinn's sculptures with cigarettes and chewing-tobacco tins fit the bill, as do Mike Bouchet's fish tank filled with diet cola and Jim Lambie's punk-inflected leather sleeve with bits of mirror. Collages and detritus-based works by John Bock, Mike Kelley, Matt Jones, Anthony Burdin, Jutta Koether, and Franz West fill out what is one of the best—if also one of the most testosterone-laden—small shows of the season. Through March 31. (Buia, 541 W. 23rd St. 212-366-9915.)

Short List

NAN GOLDIN: Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through April 14. **RACHEL HARRISON:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through March 31. **LORI NIX:** Jenkins Johnson, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-0707. Through April 21. **COURTNEY SMITH:** Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180. Through March 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

AYREEN ANASTAS AND RENE GABRI
The artists' road trip last summer to various sorts of American camps is distilled into a multimedia presentation. Slides and silent videos are accompanied by music by Iannis Xenakis and others. A map modelled on national-park handouts details stops along the way, including a campground and a burial site on the Trail of Tears, in Kentucky; former internment camps and current boot camps for troubled kids in Texas; and more pleasant camping facilities in Wyoming's Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks. It's a fascinating premise in the age of Guantánamo, but the resulting images seem oddly incongruous, featuring the same grazing bison, truck stops, housing developments, and giant, kitschy high-

way statuary that one sees in more pedestrian versions of the great American road trip. Through March 31. (Art in General, 79 Walker St. 212-219-0473.)

ANNA CONWAY
Conway's paintings recall the fantastic, alienating styles of Magritte, Gregory Crewdson, Jeff Wall, and Roger Dean (the designer of Yes album covers). Rendered in near-Photo-Realist detail, they imagine solitary, absurd moments descending on ordinary individuals: a worker on a vast and barren roof, surrounded by air ducts, enters an existential trance; two men climb the walls of a quarry; a minimum-wage worker cleaning a food-court patio shrinks under a blimp-size inflatable ad that's come untied. Conway's crisply painted tableaux suggest something of the old religious miracle transported to the everyday world, or the apocalypse rendered in miniature rather than in the usual cinemaplex-screen scale. Through March 31. (Guild & Greyshkul, 28 Wooster St. 212-625-9224.)

TONY JUST
Just rifles through art history to produce paintings and sculptures that nod in multiple aesthetic and historical directions. Sculptures modelled after works by Picasso and Keith Haring are made with materials ranging from cardboard to aluminum to plywood and painted with references to graffiti, Ab Ex, and a few other isms. Paintings on canvas, boards, and found street posters point in other directions: Daniel Buren's stripes, subway graffiti, and post-painterly abstraction. Despite relying on his elders for most of his ideas and motifs, Just adopts a punk stance that stresses his irreverence; the press release points out that "many of the sculptures were painted with a group of the artist's friends" only three days before the show opened. Through March 31. (Gavin Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258.)

"ACROSS THE TREES: ROMANIAN ART NOW"
Title aside ("Across the Trees" is a literal translation of "Transylvania"), this tight survey of contemporary Romanian art feels anything but bucolic. Black humor rules, as in Miklos Szilard's assemblage—a fur hat crowned by a bloody bandage and called "Father." Gabriela Vanga gets at the absurdity of reflexive violence with a "Tom and Jerry" segment from which the goading, clever mouse has been digitally erased, so that the poor, bumbling cat tortures himself. Cristian Pogăcean also contributes appropriationist animation, with the finger in Caravaggio's "Doubting Thomas" allowed to actively and surreally probe the wound. Serban Savu, Adrian Ghenie, and Ciprian Mureşan's bleak, dense little paintings and drawings round out the show. Through March 30. (Nolan, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-6190.)

Short List

KRISTIN BAKER: Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through April 21.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

GERARD WILLIAMS
For "Interior Worlds," an ongoing series of site-specific installations, this British artist has appropriated vacant homes near given exhibition spaces and then embellished windows with unremarkable curtains and lined the sills with tchotchkes. It's a nice idea, this stealth intervention in the streetscape—one imagines going on a conceptual treasure hunt, mistaking normal apartments for art and vice versa. But the trick doesn't translate to the gallery. Here, Williams re-creates a selection of his windows as insets in interior walls. "Madison" has yellow drapes and a dog figurine; "Lexington," a white tulle café curtain. But there's no frisson of voyeurism and no possibility of missing the artist's gesture—these "fictional neighbors" don't flirt enough with reality to intrigue. Through April 2. (Parker's Box, 193 Grand St. 718-388-2882.)

DANCE

"EDWARD SCISSORHANDS"
Matthew Bourne turns Tim Burton's cult film into an engaging dance-theatre spectacle, at BAM. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. March 27-30 at 7:30 and March 31 at 2 and 7:30.)

FLAMENCO VIVO CARLOTA SANTANA
The New York-based company of extroverted flamenco dancers and musicians returns to the Joyce with its usual blend of traditional solos and more jazzed-up, tightly choreographed ensemble pieces. The new "Palillos y Pies," a stylized exploration of the castanet, is squarely in the latter group, while "Flamenco Puro," a suite of solos and duets, allows each dancer an opportunity to respond spontaneously to the live music, expressing his or her own style and mood. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 27-28 at 7:30, March 29-30 at 8, March 31 at 2 and 8, and April 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

LEVI GONZALEZ
In "Clusterfuck," Gonzalez works out his concern with underground political and artistic movements by playing with the politics of performance. The dancers do not neglect the margins of the stage, and they engage the audience directly. The movement is high-energy, rotating pelvises escalating into pure stomping. Random objects (cushions, stuffed animals) represent the clutter of information overload through which the dancers navigate. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 28-31 at 7:30.)

"IT'S ONLY ME"
The young Ivy Baldwin is a choreographer with a knack for creating oddly coherent other worlds; her new dance-theatre piece, presented by Dance New Amsterdam, suggests a kind of alternative animal community, giving us a glimpse of the beastly dimension of human relationships. Her peripatetic imagination turns her dancers into composite creatures, funny and poignant, whose gaits, gestures, and behaviors elicit fascination and empathy. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. March 28-31 at 8.)

ELIZA MILLER DANCE COMPANY
For her new work, "O Death," the young and very musical choreographer Eliza Miller has tapped the Dutch new-music group Ensemble Klang to play an eclectic full-length requiem Mass by the British contemporary composer Oscar Bettison. Candles flicker on altars laden with small trinkets while the seven musicians and five dancers grapple with Bettison's rich score. (Danspace Project at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. March 29-April 1 at 8:30.)

"MADE IN CATALUNYA"
The festival of Catalan culture enters its second week, with (free) performances at the Baryshnikov Arts Center by exemplars of Barcelona's vibrant dance scene. On Saturday, the choreographer Cesc Gelabert—of Gelabert-Azzopardi Companiya de Dansa—performs "Glimpse," his poetic collaboration with the video artist Charles Atlas. As Gelabert moves with elegant fluidity, a shell of video screens registers his gestures (through motion capture), his visual experience (he looks at his hand, we see the hand), and, through whimsical imagery and saturated color, his thoughts and mood. (450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. March 29 and March 31 at 8:30.)

WORK AND SHOW FESTIVAL
Taye Diggs is famous as an actor, but dre.dance, the company he formed with Andrew Palermo in 2004, is quickly earning a reputation of its own for powerful dancing. For the Tribeca Performing Arts Center's artist-in-residence showing, the troupe presents "Me, Myself, and Lie," a string of vignettes about social masks. The Israeli-born choreographer Deganit Shemy shares the program. (199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. March 30-31 at 7.)

PACO PEÑA FLAMENCO COMPANY
The great Andalusian guitar virtuoso brings his small company of topnotch singers, musicians,

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TALKING PICTURES

Lorna Simpson makes photographs and films that deal with race, gender, and identity, but if that sounds forbiddingly polemical, you've got the wrong idea. The work in her elegantly spare mid-career survey at the Whitney never gives off the chill of haute conceptualism. From the beginning, Simpson has tempered formal sophistication (typically, a multipart arrangement of photographs and text panels) with teasing and provocative ambiguity. Her work is poetic, layered, and tantalizingly open-ended; it never tells us what to think (much less what she thinks), but it won't allow us to slip mindlessly through its grasp. Images of hairpieces, full lips, black glass vessels, and the bodies of black men and women whose faces are turned away or otherwise obscured are fraught but surprisingly playful. If the mysteries hinted at in her films are less immediately intriguing, it's only because they often flirt with the conventions of romantic or historical melodrama. Always going her own way, Simpson remains a model for artists who want their audience to think as freely as they do.

—*Vince Aletti*

LORNA SIMPSON

and dancers to Town Hall for a show—"A Compás," or "To the Rhythm"—that focusses on the rhythmic patterns and textures of flamenco, from the *soniquete* of the dancers' feet to the intricate phrasing of the castanets. (123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100. March 30 at 8.)

GULABI SAPERA
The forty-something Sapera was born into the nomadic Kalbeliya Sapera tribe of snake charmers from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. She and her company of twenty dancers and musicians—who play such instruments as the *sarangi*, a lute, and the *algoza*, a flute—bring the vibrant, sensual, and sometimes ecstatic dances of the Saperas to Symphony Space for two World Music Institute performances. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 30-31 at 8.)

LIZ LERMAN DANCE EXCHANGE
The first incarnation of "613 Radical Acts of Prayer," with a proposed six hundred and twelve more to go, comes to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. NJPAC's Global Exchange program sent the company to Japan, where their research focussed on *senninbari*, the thousand-stitch belts made—one stitch per person—as protection for soldiers in the Second World War. Joined by Japanese guests of widely ranging ages, the troupe uses the belts to explore the intersection of faith and radical action. Lerman's genocide study "Small Dances About Big Ideas" shares the program. (1 Center St., Newark. 888-466-5722. March 31 at 7:30 and April 1 at 3.)

"BALLET BUILDERS"
In this annual showcase organized by New Choreographers on Point, at Florence Gould Hall, performances include a duet to Philip Glass's "Étoile Polaire" by Graham Lustig, the artistic director of the American Repertory Ballet, and a spoof of "Giselle" by Christophe Garcia, the artistic director of La [Parenthèse] dance company, of Montreal. (55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. March 31 at 8 and April 1 at 3.)

CHRISTOPHER CAINES DANCE COMPANY
As part of the 92nd Street Y's "Sundays @ Three" series, Caines presents sections from his new "Farewell to Music," set to Mozart played live, and explains how the choreography responds to the score. One of the most musically erudite and articulate dance-makers around, Caines should be ideal for this sort of lecture-demonstration. The critic Mindy Aloff leads a post-performance discussion. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 1 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"La Traviata" winds up its season run, with Krassimira Stoyanova, Jonas Kaufmann, and Dwayne Croft featured in the cast; Marco Armiliato conducts. (March 28 and March 31 at 8.) ♦ **"Andrea Chénier,"** with Ben Heppner, Violeta Urmana, and Mark Delavan; Armiliato. (March 29 at 7:30 and April 2 at 8.) ♦ The Met's **"Turandot"** needs big voices to match the spacious architecture and elaborate bric-a-brac of Zeffirelli's renowned production. Andrea Gruber and Richard Margison will take the roles of the Ice Princess and her suitor Calaf, with Hei-Kyung Hong in the role of Liù; Richard Armstrong. (March 30 at 8.) ♦ If Deborah Voigt's weight loss took a little bit of lushness out of her voice, there is a glinting touch of steel to take its place. Her gifts are on generous display in **"Die Ägyptische Helena,"** a Strauss-Hofmannsthal rarity from 1928. David Fielding's production, a super-sized version of Garsington Opera's 1997 original, is an English country-house playground suspended between "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" and "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges," but it doesn't get in the way of Strauss's surprisingly compelling music. The coloratura soprano Diana Damrau almost walks off with the show as the sorceress Aithra; Fabio Luisi doughtily supports his cast while giving tender care to the complex and lavish score. (March 31 at 1:30.) ♦ The Grand Finals Concert of the Met's National Council Auditions, a reliable spotter of North America's finest vocal talent, returns, with Stephanie Blythe as host; Armiliato. (April 1 at 3.) ♦ The house celebrates its forty-year residency at Lincoln Center with a gala evening that features Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón in the leading roles of "La Bohème" (Act I), "Manon" (the Saint-Sulpice scene), and "L'Elisir d'Amore" (Act II); Bertrand de Billy. (April 3 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
"La Donna del Lago," an ingratiating Rossini opera not heard in the city since 1833, returns in a production by the director Chas Rader-Shieber. The cast is headed by two solid performers, Alexandrina Pendatchanska and Barry Banks, who are joined by Laura Vlasak Nolen, Robert McPherson, and Daniel Mobbs; George Manahan conducts. (March 28 at 7:30, March 30 at 8, and April 1 at 1:30.) ♦ Gilbert and Sullivan's **"Pirates of Penzance,"** featuring the Broadway stars Marc Kudisch and Mark Jacoby along with Myrna Paris, Kevin Burdette, Sarah Jane McMahon, and Matt Morgan; Gerald Steichen. (March 29 at 7:30 and March 31 at 1:30. These are the final performances.) ♦ **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Angela Maria Blasi, Misoon Ghim, Raul Melo, and Grant Youngblood; Manahan. (March 31 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

Britta Phillips and Dean Wareham, a.k.a. Dean & Britta, at the Hiro Ballroom.

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The hearty yet tasteful style of the conductor Colin Davis is always appreciated at Avery Fisher Hall. His first concert of the week is a one-night-only pairing of Mitsuko Uchida and Radu Lupu, who will be out front in Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos in E-Flat Major, K. 316a; Uchida is the soloist in Mozart's Concerto No. 19 in F Major, and Lupu is featured in the Concerto No. 27 in B-Flat Major. (March 28 at 7:30.) ♦ Lupu repeats his solo concerto in a concert that also includes a work by one of Davis's other favorite composers, Sibelius (the "Lemminkäinen Suite," with Thomas Stacy taking the English-horn solo in "The Swan of Tuonela"). (March 29 at 7:30 and March 30-31 at 8.) (212-875-5656.)

GEORGE BENJAMIN AND THE ZANKEL BAND
The gifted British composer, master of a complex and lapidary style, presides over a concert that features such notable works as "Viola, Viola" and "At First Light"; the pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard also contributes works by Webern (the Variations, Op. 27), Schumann, and Debussy. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 29 at 7:30.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
March 29 at 8: Leon Fleisher, the kind of august musician who sets an example for everyone else onstage with him, serves as both conductor and soloist in a concert with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra that features works by Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major), Mendelssohn, and Haydn (the "Farewell" Symphony). ♦ March 31 at 7: Paula Robison, the resident *maestra* of the *flauto* at the Temple of Dendur, completes her "Great Vivaldi" series with her chamber orchestra in a program that includes the Sinfonia for Strings in B Minor ("Al Santo Sepolcro") and for Flute and Strings in G Minor ("La Notte"). (Fifth Ave at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
David Robertson conducts his energetic ensemble in two concerts at Carnegie Hall. March 30 at 8: Bartók's First Piano Concerto (with Pierre-Laurent Aimard), Sibelius's Second Symphony, and the New York première of George Benjamin's "Sudden Time." ♦ March 31 at 8: Music by Mahler, Ravel ("Shéhérazade," with the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham), and John Adams ("Harmonielehre"). (212-247-7800.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
The magisterial British choral group, presented by Miller Theatre, offers works by Monteverdi, Palestrina, and Gombert in the capacious acoustic of Riverside Church. (Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. March 31 at 8.)

LE JARDIN DES VOIX
William Christie, who has an ear for vocal talent, leads his fine ensemble of young singers in a generous selection of Monteverdi madrigals as well as scenes from operas by Monteverdi ("Orfeo" and "The Coronation of Poppea"), Handel, and Haydn; Christie conducts the orchestra of Les Arts Florissants. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 31 at 8.)

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS
The renowned London orchestra, long associated with Neville Marriner, collaborates with the violinist Joshua Bell in music by Vivaldi ("The Four Seasons") and Tchaikovsky (including the Serenade for Strings). (Carnegie Hall. 212-721-6500. April 1 at 2.)

RECITALS

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN
The Canadian pianist, an intriguing artist with a magnificent technique, comes to the 92nd Street Y to offer works inspired by song, including four

of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" and Liszt's "Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor" and "Three Petrarch Sonnets." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 28 at 8.)

TRIO MEDIÆVAL / CRASH ENSEMBLE
In an enticing embrace between early music and the new, the ethereal Scandinavian female vocal trio shares a program with the Irish avant-garde group, which will offer a new work by Donnacha Dennehy (featuring the pianist Lisa Moore); John Schaefer hosts. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 28 at 8.)

TRIO SOLISTI
The bright and brilliant American piano trio appears at Symphony Space's Thalia Theatre (with the clarinettist Alan R. Kay) to offer works by Mendelssohn, Piazzolla ("Le Grand Tango"), and Paul Moravec (the kinetic "Tempest Fantasy," which won him the Pulitzer Prize). (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 29 at 7:30.)

"FLUTE BOOK FOR THE 20TH CENTURY"
Marya Martin, the doyenne of the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, premières new works for flute by Chen Yi, Tania León, Paul Moravec, and Ned Rorem, among others; Colette Valentine accompanies her. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 29 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
A single, substantial program is on offer this weekend, with the venue's director, the violinist Mark Peskanov, leading a crew of virtuosos in a bushel of Vivaldi concertos (including "The Four Seasons") and a new work by Igor Raykhelson. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. March 29-31 at 8 and April 1 at 4.)

BARBARA FRITTOLI
The Italian soprano, admired in the opera world, delves into the song repertory in a program at Alice Tully Hall that features lieder, canzoni, and *mélodies* by Beethoven, Schubert, and Duparc—in addition to operatic arias by Bellini, Rossini, and Verdi. (212-721-6500. April 1 at 5.)

TALICH QUARTET
The appealing Czech performers, masters of an earthy, honest style, come to the Frick Collection to perform string quartets by Haydn (the "Lark"), Mendelssohn, Schulhoff, and Janáček (the searing No. 2, "Intimate Letters"). (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. April 1 at 5.)

PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD
Carnegie Hall's man of the week offers an almost unbelievably broad program of short piano works by Scarlatti, Beethoven, Ligeti, Ravel, Bartók, Cage ("4'33""), and others, with a discussion as well. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 1 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

AFTER THE WEDDING
A drama about an orphanage director in India who goes home to Copenhagen, where he learns surprising family secrets. Directed by Susanne Bier. In Danish, Swedish, Hindi, and English. Opening March 30. (IFC Center.)

BLADES OF GLORY
Josh Gordon and Will Speck directed this comedy about two banned singles skaters who return to compete as a figure-skating pair. Starring Will Ferrell and Jon Heder. Opening March 30. (In wide release.)

THE HAWK IS DYING
A drama, directed by Julian Goldberger and based on a book by Harry Crews, about a lonely man who raises hawks. Starring Paul Giamatti and Michelle Williams. Opening March 30. (Cinema Village.)

KILLER OF SHEEP
The first theatrical release of Charles Burnett's 1977 drama, about an African-American man (Henry G. Sanders) who is burdened with family responsibilities. Opening March 30. (IFC Center.)

THE LOOKOUT
A crime drama, directed by Scott Frank, about a mentally impaired janitor (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) who gets involved in a bank robbery. Co-starring Jeff Daniels and Isla Fisher. Opening March 30. (In wide release.)

MEET THE ROBINSONS
An animated comedy about a futuristic family, directed by Stephen J. Anderson. Featuring the voices of Tom Selleck, Angela Bassett, and Adam West. Opening March 30. (In wide release.)

SACCO AND VANZETTI
A documentary by Peter Miller about the trial and execution, in 1927, of the two anarchists. Opening March 30. (Quad Cinema.)

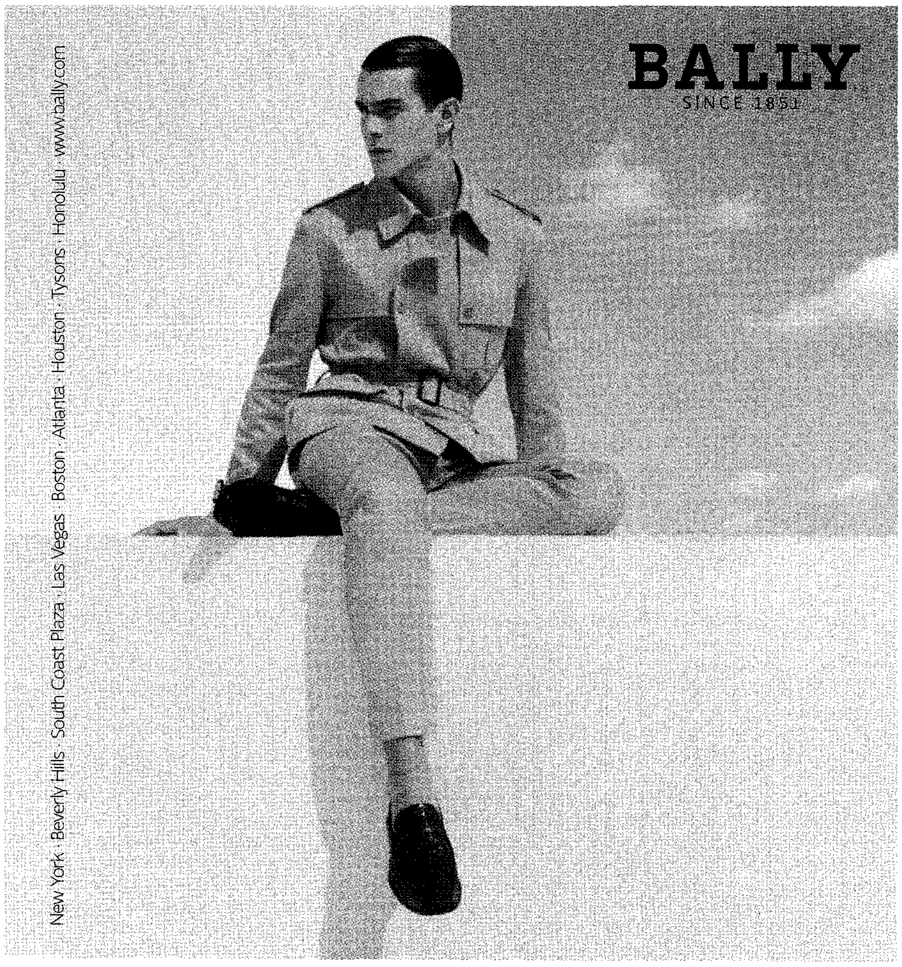
U-CARMEN
An updated version of Bizet's "Carmen," set in contemporary South Africa, directed by Mark Dornford-May. In Xhosa. Opening March 28. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

AMAZING GRACE
Square but stirring. William Wilberforce (Ioan Gruffudd), upon entering Parliament, in 1780, at the age of twenty-one, resolved, with the aid of his friend William Pitt (Benedict Cumberbatch), soon to be Prime Minister, at the age of twenty-four, to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Michael Apted's historical epic, from a screenplay by Steven Knight, starts in 1797, when Wilberforce, suffering from colitis and getting much rained on (every time he goes out, he's doused), is at a low ebb. He is saved by the attentions of Barbara Spooner (Romola Garai), a Gainsborough beauty with a luxurious pile of red hair and an exposed pale bosom. As the picture goes backward in time and then forward again, there are eloquent debates, much moral and physical anguish from Wilberforce, and a spirit of Christian resolve, attended, fortunately, by wit. Gruffudd has a serious brow, a wide smile, and romantically disordered locks, and, in the parliamentary scenes, he plants his feet and lets his voice ring out. With Albert Finney, Michael Gambon, the singer Youssou N'Dour, and the supercilious Rufus Sewell, who might have trouble stifling a smirk while reciting the Seven Last Words of Christ.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/5/07.) (In wide release.)

BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA
Katherine Paterson's children's classic gets an imaginative, emotional telling in the director Gabor Csupo's film about a bullied seventh grader (Josh Hutcherson) whose friendship with a young girl (AnnaSophia Robb) leads them to create a made-up, escapist world. The screenwriters, Jeff Stockwell and David Paterson (the author's son), have crafted a wonderful and affecting story, deftly balancing the real-world problems of introverted children and the fantasy lives they create to help them deal with their solitude. The special effects suggest a Narnia-like romp, but the movie has a darker, more sorrowful landscape to explore and it does so brilliantly, with nuance and sincerity.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

COBRA VERDE
Werner Herzog's last collaboration with Klaus Kinski, from 1987, adapted from a novel by Bruce Chatwin, is a spasmodic picaresque about a laborer in nineteenth-century Brazil who kills his boss, becomes a feared bandit, gets hired as a plantation overseer, impregnates the grandee's daughters, and is shipped off to West Africa, where he becomes a slave trader, the leader of a tribal uprising, and an honored warlord. As with Herzog's other historical spectacles, the power-madness he films is inseparable from that which he wielded on location: the behind-the-scenes reality of his mass mobilizations of extras for processions and battles was likely more interesting to watch than the on-screen results. While unstintingly depicting the depredations on which Western society was built, the director is gener-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BAERBEL SCHMIDT

ous with indigenous depravities as well, along with stereotypical dances of bare-breasted maidens and other pseudo-ethnographic kitsch. The result is little more than a bellow of aestheticized cynicism: life, as seen here, is nasty, brutish, and short, and Herzog seems to like it that way. In German.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

THE HOST

Something is hiding in the River Han, in the middle of Seoul. As a result of industrial pollution, a small tadpole has grown not into a respectable frog but into a bad-tempered tadpole the size of a bus. Soon it starts leaving the water, snatching ordinary Koreans from the banks and carrying them off to its fetid home in the sewers. When a young girl is taken, her father, the hitherto hopeless Gang-du (Song Kang-ho), enlists the aid of his family and sets off to save her. Bong Joon-ho's monster movie is often funny and occasionally disgusting, but rarely does it strike you as ridiculous. By the end (which is only just happy), you feel threatened and drained, as you should after a grownup fairy tale, and there are moments of surprising grace—as when an apparition of the girl sneaks into the midst of a communal meal. On the other hand, don't go looking for mercy from the beast; this thing would treat King Kong as a typical bleeding-heart mammal. In Korean.—*Anthony Lane* (3/12/07) (In wide release.)

I THINK I LOVE MY WIFE

A missed opportunity. For his second directorial effort, Chris Rock (working with a co-writer, Louis C.K.) closely adapted Eric Rohmer's 1972 "Chloe in the Afternoon," about a happily married businessman with a wandering eye whose fantasy life is put to the test by an intense platonic relationship with a temptress who reappears from his past. Rock, who also stars, can't decide whether to aim for realism or for comedy, and the result is neither credible nor funny. Filming on location in New York, Rock places his character, Richard Cooper, in an investment bank in a midtown tower where they ought to review their security arrangements: sleek, sexy Nikki Tru (Kerry Washington) keeps turning up in his office uninvited and unannounced. As a director, Rock doesn't reimagine Rohmer's story but merely borrows it; as an actor, he keeps slipping back into an overeager yelping that recalls his small-screen persona. The best thing in the film is the comic riffing on a serious subject, the social identity of America's black middle class, but it is too diluted by sketch comedy to take hold.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

"Blades of Glory," a comedy starring Will Ferrell and Jon Heder, opens March 30.

THE LIVES OF OTHERS

This first feature from the young German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck starts in 1984, in East Berlin. A successful playwright (Sebastian Koch) and his girlfriend (Martina Gedeck), hitherto trusted by the state, are placed under Stasi surveillance. Their investigator, a lonely ascetic by the name of Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe), is told to entrap them, instead of which, little by little, he lets them off the hook. Given the movie's cross-weave of envy, terror, paranoia, and endangered principle, Donnersmarck might have been expected to tie himself in knots; yet the outcome, after two and a half hours, remains taut and clear, and by the end you feel exhausted and oddly uplifted. What was the last new movie that put you through so much yet convinced you that the ordeal was worthwhile? With Ulrich Tukur as Wiesler's cheerfully vicious boss. In German.—*A.L.* (2/12/07) (In wide release.)

MOTHER KÜSTERS GOES TO HEAVEN

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's satirical melodrama, from 1975, is set in motion by the offscreen outburst of Hermann Küsters, an elderly factory worker who kills his boss and commits suicide by leaping into a machine. Fascinated by spontaneous acts of violence, Fassbinder here considers the fate of those left behind, in particular Küsters's widow, Emma (Brigitte Mira), whose modest existence is overturned by the catastrophe. Not only have her lifelong illusions of tranquil order been dispelled, but her home and her life have been invaded by probing journalists, especially a certain Niemeyer (Gottfried John), who promises sympathy but delivers scandal. Her children are little help: Corinna (Ingrid Caven), a sultry cabaret singer, uses the tragedy for self-promotion, and Ernst, a mild-mannered meat packer, is pulled away by his wife, Helene (Irm Hermann), an egotistical striver. Thus Emma Küsters, lonely, desperate, and vulnerable, becomes the plaything of opportunists, who lead the story to a surprising conclusion. Casting his withering gaze freely across the political spectrum, Fassbinder derides the predatory manipulations that pass for information and ideology, compared to which Corinna's tawdry art appears as a redemptive mask of gaiety. In German.—*R.B.* (MOMA; April 3.)

THE NAMESAKE

A word is worth a thousand pictures. Jhumpa Lahiri's prose carries the weight of experience, color, and texture, but Mira Nair's adaptation of Lahiri's 2000 novel (Sooni Taraporevala wrote the screenplay), while perfectly pleasant, is a little bland. After Ashima (Tabu), a beautiful young woman from Calcutta, marries the gentle university researcher Ashoke Ganguli (Irfan Khan) and relocates to New Jersey, she stands silently in her suburban kitchen; the magic of Lahiri's depiction of the strangeness of a new culture is mostly gone. The filmmakers also have an insoluble problem on their hands: the story jumps ahead abruptly in time, so each scene is meant to epitomize a phase of the couple's life in America, but since Ashima and Ashoke are both reserved, each word of dialogue is burdened with more significance than it can possibly bear. Things lighten up a lot in the next generation, when the couple's son, Gogol (Kal Penn), eagerly assimilates to American ways. Zuleikha Robinson is very lively as a young Bengali woman who has spent some time in Paris and carries on like a character in a scandalous French novel. In Bengali, Hindi, and English.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

OFFSIDE

The Iranian director Jafar Panahi offers only pallid criticism of his country's legal code in this comic drama about six young Iranian women who disguise themselves as boys in an attempt to sneak into a soccer game, from which women are barred. The daring is in the method: Panahi filmed the dramatic action in and around Azadi Stadium, in Tehran, on the day of the World Cup qualifying match between Iran and Bahrain, the results of which factor into the story. Panahi's subject is not only the absurd law (which has comic consequences as well—the stadium has no women's bathrooms) but the narrow-minded attitudes on which it is based, as expressed by young soldiers who dutifully stop the women. Nonetheless, Panahi's film, with its blandly sentimental view of soccer, nationalism, soldiers, families, and the religious police, though banned in Iran, is no audacious samizdat but, rather, sweetened exoticism for export. In Farsi.—*R.B.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

THE OTHER HALF

The young Chinese director Ying Liang's second feature, made in 2006, starts out as a work of cool, wry modernism but soon veers toward a fierce and harrowing cry of political rage. Xiaofen, a young legal secretary in the boom town of Zigong, hears bitter and desperate clients recount their tales of personal and commercial woe, but she has problems of her own: her live-in boyfriend is a drunk and a gambler whose chronic debt and jealous anger make her life hell. With a blend of documentary and fiction, Ying roots the action firmly in a depressing cultural context: the ubiquitous official loudspeakers blaring police announcements and the television droning patriotic propaganda belie the economic and moral corruption that pervades the system and infects private life. Filming with a puckishly bland interview-style fixed camera and sarcastic cityscapes, Ying convincingly depicts a state of repressed volatility which, when it blows, does so with a far-reaching, vitriolic, righteous audacity that has few parallels in the modern cinema. In Mandarin.—*R.B.* (MOMA; April 1, and Walter Reade Theatre; March 31.)

PREMONITION

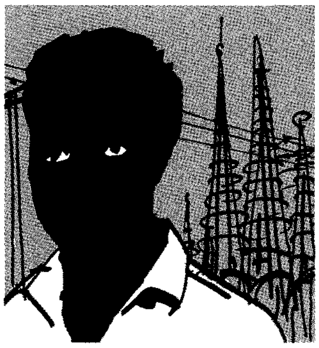
The miserable tale of Linda Hanson (Sandra Bullock), who foresees the death of her husband, Jim (Julian McMahon), only to wake up and find him alive and kicking, or at any rate showering, the next day. This causes her some consternation, and much of Mennan Yapo's movie consists of

LEFT: TOMER HANUKA; RIGHT: JEROEN KOOLHAAS

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
WATTS HAPPENING

In 1977, Charles Burnett, a U.C.L.A. film student, made his thesis film, "Killer of Sheep," a fictional portrait of life in the Watts section of Los Angeles, for less than ten thousand dollars. The film has attained legendary status, but it has never been released theatrically before, because of music-rights issues. Burnett used many kinds of African-American music on the soundtrack, and the movie itself has the bedraggled eloquence of an old blues record. The amateur actors, who occasionally burst into fury, combined with the black-and-white cinematography, bring the poverty of Watts closer to us emotionally. In the conventional sense, not much happens. A hardworking, poorly paid man (Henry G. Sanders)—a father and husband—has fallen into melancholia; the simplest tasks in his life are fraught with difficulty. The affectingly beautiful scenes include children playing in the nooks and crannies of buildings and a heartbreaking moment of thwarted romance, when the hero refuses to respond to the fervent embraces of his wife as they dance to Dinah Washington's "This Bitter Earth."

—David Denby



the heroine looking bothered and bewildered; the high point, and a candidate for the annals of kitsch, comes as she sketches out a day-by-day calendar of weird events and scribbles the climactic entry, "JIM DIES." The film is an unhelpful choice for Bullock, who seems determined to offload the comic deftness that powered her early career; why pick a script (by Bill Kelly) that is guaranteed to make her seem unlikable? Could she not have borrowed her character's unusual talent and predicted the nonsense that would ensue? With Amber Valletta as a seductress, Kate Nelligan as Linda's mother, and Peter Stormare as the kind of shrink who puts you off going into therapy forever.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

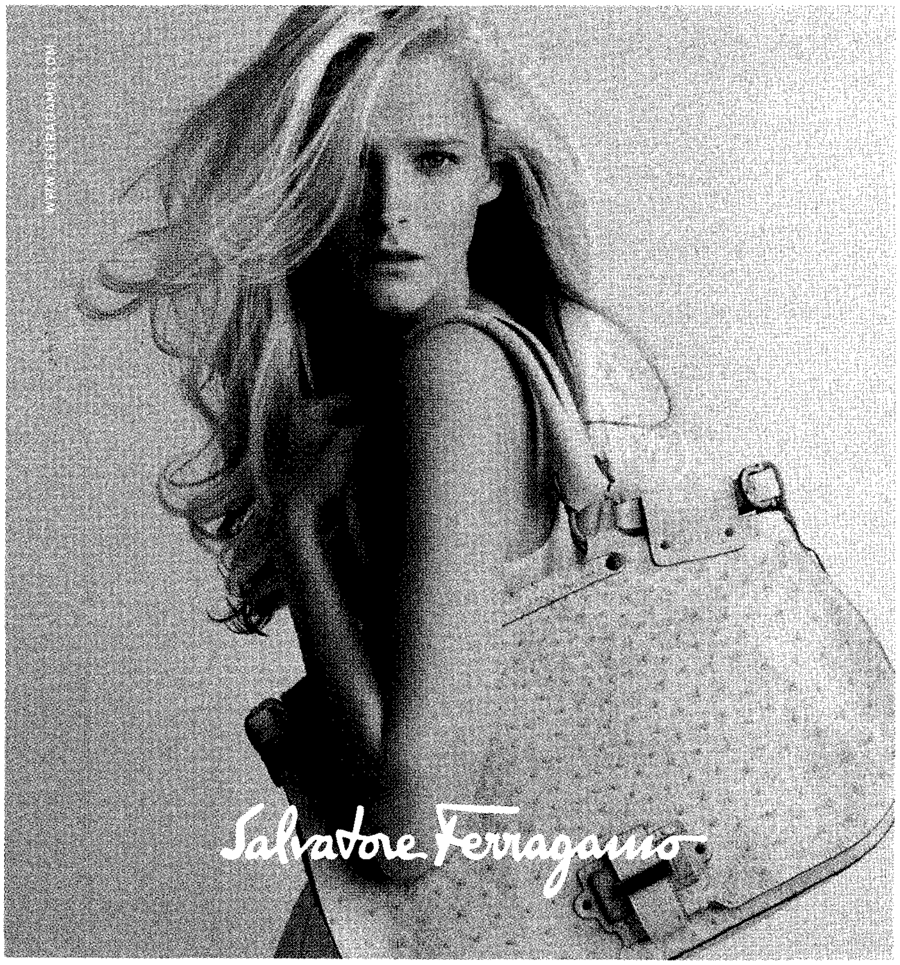
REIGN OVER ME
Not, as you might think, a quickie sequel to "The Queen" but the story of Charlie Fineman (Adam Sandler), a dentist who lost his wife and three daughters in the horror of 9/11. He is reduced to a murmuring wreck, roaming New York on a scooter, until he has a chance encounter with an old dental-school roommate of his named Alan Johnson (Don Cheadle). Alan has troubles of his own, though they seem paltry by comparison: a frozen marriage, plus a patient (Saffron Burrows) who keeps offering her sexual services. *He* should worry. Slowly, and not without mishap, the two men rediscover their friendship. The result could well have turned cheap and maudlin, but the writer and director, Mike Binder, grasps the stubbornness of grief; Charlie may be hauled back from the verge of suicide, but he will never be cured. Even viewers allergic to Sandler may concede that his air of mumbling drift is right for the role, and Cheadle never misses a beat. With Liv Tyler, Donald Sutherland, and a chunky soundtrack: the title echoes a song from "Quadrophenia."—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

SHOOTER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

300
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY
The 1920-22 Irish revolt against the English, reimagined by the social realist Ken Loach as an awkwardly violent and sombre old poem made without the usual Irish flourishes of wildness or lyricism. The British military cars, tin lizzies carrying men in the open, are almost comically antique and vulnerable; the I.R.A. rebels, who wear awkward long coats and caps as they scramble across a hill, look less like a guerrilla force than like fellows who had planned to go shopping with their families but somehow got sidetracked into a bizarre adventure. Loach is trying for his own kind of scrappy truthfulness, in which pent-up physical violence bursts forth clumsily, without the usual stylized glamour of classic movie mayhem. Here, violence has the look of surprise. With Cillian Murphy as a refined young rebel who wants complete separation from Great Britain and a socialist revolution in Ireland, and Padraic Delaney as his rough-hewn brother, who is willing to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Shot in County Cork by the cinematographer Barry Ackroyd.—*D.D.* (3/19/07) (In wide release.)

ZODIAC
The great film critic Manny Farber once praised "termite art," the kind of small, stubborn movie that chews its way through a narrow piece of turf. David Fincher's "Zodiac" is mollusk art: the movie keeps elaborating itself out of its own discharge, hardening its emotions, anxieties, and energies into a shell of obsession. Fincher, working with a fantastically detailed script by the young James Vanderbilt, chronicles the case of the self-identified Zodiac killer, a taunting, publicity-mad creep who murdered at least five people in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late sixties and sent confessional notes about the crimes (sometimes in cipher) to



THE
NEW YORKER
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THIS WEEK:

Slide Show: Portraits by Steve Pyke.

New Orleans Journal: Daily dispatches by Dan Baum.

PLUS

The Cartoon Caption Contest, animated versions of New Yorker cartoons, and an archive of articles from the magazine as well as hundreds of past Web exclusives.

THE NEW YORKER'S AUDIO EDITION, AVAILABLE AT AUDIBLE.COM/NEWYORKER

newspapers. At the San Francisco *Chronicle*, a young cartoonist, Robert Graysmith (Jake Gyllenhaal), becomes obsessed with the case and stays obsessed, outlasting the police, other reporters, and the killer himself. Moving swiftly but with precise attention to the emotional coloring of such things as weather and light and dour institutional spaces, Fincher runs through interrogations, trips to the library, and the sorting and matching of mounds of evidence. It's a superbly made but (by its very nature) inconclusive film, in which the obsession itself, rather than any payoff, is the point. With Robert Downey, Jr., as an alcoholic ace reporter, Anthony Edwards and Mark Ruffalo as two hardworking cops, and Chloë Sevigny as Graysmith's exasperated wife. Based on Graysmith's books about the case.—*D.D.* (3/19/07) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

GHOST RIDER: In wide release. **THE HILLS HAVE EYES 2:** In wide release. **THE PAGE TURNER:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **WILD HOGS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—March 28-April 3: New York Underground Film Festival. For program information, visit www.nyuff.com.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Graham Greene Noir." March 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Third Man" (1949, Carol Reed). ♦ "Creatively Speaking." March 31 at 2: "Al Otro Lado" (2006, Natalia Almada; in Spanish) and short films. ♦ March 31 at 4:30: "La Bruja: A Witch from the Bronx" (2005, Felix Rodriguez) and short films. ♦ March 31 at 6:15: "Bling: A Planet Rock" (2007, Raquel Cepeda). ♦ March 31 at 9:15: "Black Body Radiation" (2007, Greg Tate) and "Love Aquarium" (2004, K'aramuu Kush). ♦ April 1 at 4:30: Short films about Haitian women, including "Stop Crying in Silence" (2001, Rachèle Magloire; in French and Creole). ♦ April 1 at 6:50: Short films, including "Homecoming" (1998, Charlene Gilbert). ♦ April 1 at 9:15: "Music Is My Life, Politics My Mistress: The Story of Oscar Brown, Jr." (2005, Donnie L. Betts). ♦ In revival. April 2-3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. March 28-29 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:30: "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." (1953, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ Through April 19: "B Musicals." March 30 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50: "Rise and Shine" (1941, Allan Dwan). ♦ March 30 at 2:50, 6:15, and 9:40: "Hold That Co-Ed" (1938, George Marshall). ♦ March 31 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "Sweater Girl" (1942, William Clemens). ♦ March 31 at 2:30, 5:50, and 9:10: "Double or Nothing" (1937, Theodore Reed). ♦ April 1 at 1, 4:15, and 7:30: "Sitting Pretty" (1933, Harry Joe Brown). ♦ April 1 at 2:45, 6, and 9:15: "Torch Singer" (1933, Alexander Hall and George Somnes). ♦ April 2 at 1:15, 5:15, and 9:15: "Babes on Swing Street" (1944, Edward C. Lilley). ♦ April 2 at 2:40 and 6:40: "San Antonio Rose" (1941, Charles Lamont). ♦ April 2 at 4 and 8: "Strictly in the Groove" (1942, Vernon Keays).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—In première. April 1 at 6: "A Sunday in Kigali" (2006, Robert Favreau; in French). ♦ Through April 24: The films of Jacques Tati. April 3 at 12:30 and 7:30: "Jour de Fête" (1949; in French). ♦ April 3 at 4 and 9: "Traffic" (1971; in French, Dutch, and English).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In première. March 28-29 (call for showtimes): "Cobra Verde" (†). ♦ In revival. March 30-April 1 at noon: "Ugetsu" (1953, Kenji Mizoguchi; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." March 30-31: "Mulholland Drive" (2001, David Lynch). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. April 3 at 7:30: "Iran: A Cinematographic Revolution" (2006, Nader T. Homayoun), introduced by the critic Godfrey Cheshire.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"New Directors/New Films." March 28 at 6: "The Only One" (2006, Geoffrey Enthoven; in Flemish). ♦ March 28 at 8:45: "Euphoria" (2006, Ivan Vyrypaev; in Russian). ♦ March 29 at 6: "Congorama" (2006, Philippe Falardeau; in French). ♦ March 29 at 8:45: "Rome Rather Than You" (2006, Tariq Teguia; in Arabic). ♦ March 30 at 6: "Gradually . . ." (2006, Maziar Miri; in Farsi). ♦ March 30 at 8:30: "The Great World of Sound" (2006, Craig Zobel). ♦ March 31 at 1: "Meanwhile" (2006, Diego Lerman; in Spanish). ♦ March 31 at 3:45: "Stealth" (2006, Lionel Baier; in French and Polish). ♦ March 31 at 6:30: "Day Night Day Night" (2006, Julia Loktev). ♦ April 1 at 1: "Padre Nuestro" (2007, Christopher Zalla; in Spanish and English). ♦ April 1 at 3:45: "Reprise" (2006, Joachim Trier; in Norwegian). ♦ April 1 at 6:45: "The Other Half" (†). ♦ Films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder in the museum's collection. All films are in German. April 2 at 6:15: "Recruits in Ingolstadt" (1970). ♦ April 2 at 8: "Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?" (1969). ♦ April 3 at 6: "Veronika Voss" (1982). ♦ April 3 at 8:15: "Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven" (†).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through April 8: "The Real Edie Sedgwick." All films are directed by Andy Warhol. March 31 at 2: "Poor Little Rich Girl" (1965). ♦ March 31 at 3:30: "Restaurant" (1965). ♦ March 31 at 5: "Vinyl" (1965). ♦ April 1 at 3 and 6: "Outer and Inner Space" (1965).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. March 28-April 3 (call for showtimes): "Headspace" (2005, Jethro Senger).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." March 30 at 9:30: "Forest of Bliss" (1986, Robert Gardner), introduced by Arlene Shechet.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." March 30-31: "Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle" (2004, Danny Leiner).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Currents." April 1 at 4:30 and April 3 at 7:30: "Verdict on Auschwitz" (1993, Rolf Bickel and Dietrich Wagner; in German). ♦ "Thalia Film Classics." April 1 at 8 and April 3 at 5: "The Baker's Wife" (1938, Marcel Pagnol; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"New Directors/New Films." March 28 at 6: "Rome Rather Than You" (2006, Tariq Teguia; in Arabic). ♦ March 28 at 9: "Congorama" (2006, Philippe Falardeau; in French). ♦ March 29 at 6: "Euphoria" (2006, Ivan Vyrypaev; in Russian). ♦ March 29 at 8:45: "The Only One" (2006, Geoffrey Enthoven; in Flemish). ♦ March 30 at 6: "Stealth" (2006, Lionel Baier; in French and Polish). ♦ March 30 at 9: "Day Night Day Night" (2006, Julia Loktev). ♦ March 31 at 12:30 and April 1 at 5:15: "The Great World of Sound" (2006, Craig Zobel). ♦ March 31 at 3:15: "The Other Half" (†). ♦ March 31 at 6: "Reprise" (2006, Joachim Trier; in Norwegian). ♦ March 31 at 9: "Padre Nuestro" (2007, Christopher Zalla; in Spanish and English). ♦ April 1 at 3: "Gradually . . ." (2006, Maziar Miri; in Farsi). ♦ April 1 at 8: "Meanwhile" (2006, Diego Lerman; in Spanish).

DAN JAMES

READINGS AND TALKS

"READINGS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR"
George Packer, a writer with this magazine, Jacki Lyden, a senior correspondent for N.P.R., and Michael Moss, of the New York *Times*, join Leslie Gelb, of the Council on Foreign Relations, for a discussion about reporting on the war in Iraq. (P.S. 107, 1301 Eighth Ave., between 13th and 14th Sts., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-330-9340. March 28 at 7:30.)

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for "Toward International Peace Through the Arts" and is the work of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, presents the actors of the LAByrinth Theatre Company, who will read from the works of Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Octavio Paz, and other Latin-American poets. In English and Spanish. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. March 30 at noon.)

"ISLAMIC ART AND ITALY"
Inspired by the Metropolitan Museum's new exhibition "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797," the Italian Cultural Institute is presenting two lectures. The first, on March 30 at 6, features Giovanni Curatola, a professor of Islamic archeology at the University of Udine. For the second, on April 2 at 6, Stefano Carboni, the curator of the aforementioned exhibition, will be joined by Elisa Gagliardi Mangilli, a fellow at the Metropolitan Museum, who will discuss the influence in Europe of Islamic and Indian textiles. (Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-879-4242, ext. 386.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE
George Saunders and Jonathan Lethem talk about their new books, the short-story collection "In Persuasion Nation" and the novel "You Don't Love Me Yet." The local rock band the Night Time will also perform "covers" from the fictitious band at the center of Lethem's novel. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. March 30 at 7.)

OPIUM MAGAZINE PARTY
The literary and humor journal celebrates the publication of its fourth print issue. Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, will read from his forthcoming collection of fiction, "A Circle Is a Balloon and Compass Both." The three winners of *Opium's* seven-line-short-story contest will also read, with the help of a megaphone. (The Musical Box, 219 Avenue B, at 13th St. No tickets necessary. March 31 at 8.)

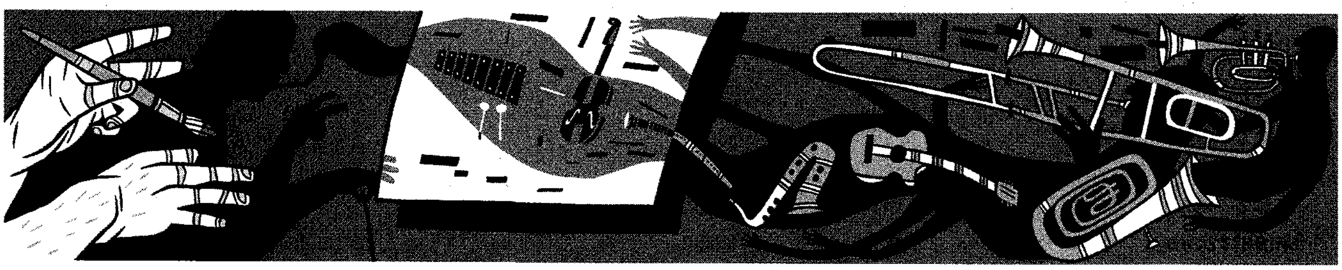
92ND STREET Y
The *New Yorker* classical-music critic Alex Ross discusses connections between poetry and composers, specifically looking at Debussy (a fan of Verlaine and Mallarmé) and Schoenberg (who immersed himself in Stefan George). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 1 at 11 A.M.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"DOWNTOWN SEDER"
Michael Dorf, the downtown impresario who founded the Knitting Factory, has gathered a number of artists and musicians to commemorate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. The pre-Passover evening, which is one part instruction and one part entertainment, features some two dozen performers, including Neil Sedaka, Dan Zanes, and Tovah Feldshuh. A full kosher dinner will be served. (Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 212-608-0555. March 28 at 7.)

SUMMERTIME BLUES
The Cyclone, Coney Island's fabled wooden roller coaster, starts running again after being mothballed for the winter. The ride is free for the first hundred folks to line up (at least for those more than fifty-four inches tall). This annual tradition is organized by the coaster's operator, the amusement park Astroland, which is entering its last season; the owners recently sold to developers, and the park is closing permanently at the end of the summer. However, the Cyclone, which turns eighty in June, is set to remain for years to come. (1000 Surf Ave., at W. 10th St. For more information, visit www.astroland.com. April 1 at noon, with a ceremonial christening a half hour earlier performed by the Brooklyn Borough President, Marty Markowitz, who will do the honors with a bottle of chocolate egg cream.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
With the crush of Asian art sales over, **Christie's** holds a tasteful auction of European furniture (March 28), followed by one of twentieth-century decorative art and design pieces (March 29). The house then takes stock of the burgeoning market in musical instruments (April 2), in a sale that includes both a 1729 Stradivarius violin and two guitars from the collection of the late country singer Merle Travis. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Furniture is the thing at **Sotheby's** as well this week: a sale of twentieth-century decorative art and design objects (March 31) includes a large array of works by George Nakashima. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
WEIMAR RESTORED
April 10-15

Rainer Werner Fassbinder adapted "Berlin Alexanderplatz," Alfred Döblin's novel of the Weimar Republic, into a teeming, turbulent fifteen-hour television series that will be shown in its entirety at MOMA. (212-355-6160.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ACTION PAINTING
April 17

In Earle Brown's iconic "December 1952," art and music are one: the score, a mysterious assemblage of black dashes and rectangles, looks more like a Mondrian painting than a musical composition. As part of an eightieth-birthday tribute to Brown, the vocalist Joan La Barbara offers her own interpretation of the piece at the Chelsea Art Museum. (212-255-0719.)

NIGHT LIFE
EVOLVING
April 20-22

The Green Apple Music & Arts Festival, which began last year with events in New York, has now expanded to include Chicago and San Francisco. Locally, the earth-friendly event features a free concert in Central Park with the children's entertainer Laurie Berkner and shows by the folksingers Tom Paxton and Richard Shindell, the jazz bassist Avishai Cohen, the American Idol Taylor Hicks, and others. (www.greenapplefestival.com.)

ART
LIMNING THE LINE
April 21-July 21

The German-born Venezuelan artist Gego (née Gertrude Goldschmidt; 1912-94) is the subject of an upcoming exhibit at the Drawing Center subtitled "Between Transparency and the Invisible." Drawings, prints, and wire sculptures dating from the mid-fifties to the late eighties will be on view. (212-219-2166.)

THE THEATRE
TRICKY DICK
April 22

Frank Langella and Michael Sheen star in the Donmar Warehouse production of "Frost/Nixon." The drama, written by Peter Morgan, is based on conversations that the British television host David Frost had with President Richard Nixon in 1977. (212-239-6200.)

Joan La Barbara and others pay tribute to Earle Brown.

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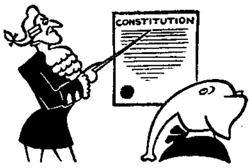
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
NEVER, EVER LAND



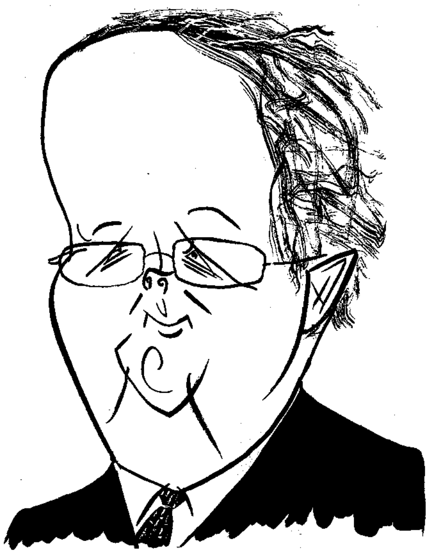
"I would never, ever make a change in a United States Attorney position for political reasons, or if it would in any way jeopardize an ongoing serious investigation," Attorney General Alberto Gonzales told the Senate Judiciary Committee on January 18th. "I just would not do it."

No one who has been paying attention to the troubles of the present Administration should have been surprised by what followed: two months of mounting revelations about the dismissal of eight U.S. Attorneys, for mostly political reasons. By last week, the revelations—along with the denials, the obfuscations, and the selective document dumps they provoked—had become a full-blown scandal. On Tuesday, the White House said that it would allow congressional committees to conduct "interviews" with Karl Rove, the President's senior political adviser, and Harriet Miers, the former White House counsel, but the sessions would be behind closed doors and not under oath, with no transcripts. The offer was declined, and that afternoon President Bush, in his most petulant self-dramatizing mode, declared, from the White House Diplomatic Reception Room, that it was all right for Gonzales to appear before Congress, but that having his aides testify would be tantamount to holding "show trials" under "klieg lights." Thus challenged, committees in the House and the Senate authorized subpoenas for top White House and Justice Department officials.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The President has the right to hire U.S. Attorneys with like-minded political leanings. The prosecutors are political appointees and, as such, are often replaced at the start of a President's term. What's unusual is to fire them in the middle of their own four-year terms. Assembling a compatible legal team is one thing; expecting its members to tailor individual investigations to partisan demands is another. The firings are symptomatic of how the Administration's zeal for political loyalty and its intolerance of independent thinking result in chaos.

Gonzales defensively claimed in a press conference on March 13th that he had nothing to do with the dismissals, but he implied that the prosecutors were weak performers, thus inflaming those among them who had recently been commended for doing a splendid job. Subordinates were blamed for handling the matter poorly: Miers, who had initially proposed replacing all ninety-three U.S. Attorneys; and D. Kyle Sampson, Gonzales's chief of staff, who abruptly resigned, ostensibly because he had not made Justice officials aware of just how closely he had worked with the White House to refine Miers's idea.



But Sampson's e-mails reveal him to be a loyal aide, intent on pleasing his superiors. Noting in January, 2005, that "it would be weird to ask" the prosecutors "to leave before completing at least a 4-year term," and that some home-state senators would resist the move, he concluded, "That said, if Karl thinks there would be political will to do it, then so do I." Two months later, Sampson sent Miers a list ranking all the federal prosecutors. U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald was reportedly in a group deemed to "have not distinguished themselves." At the time, he was investigating the roles of Rove and Scooter Libby, then Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff, in the Valerie Plame case.

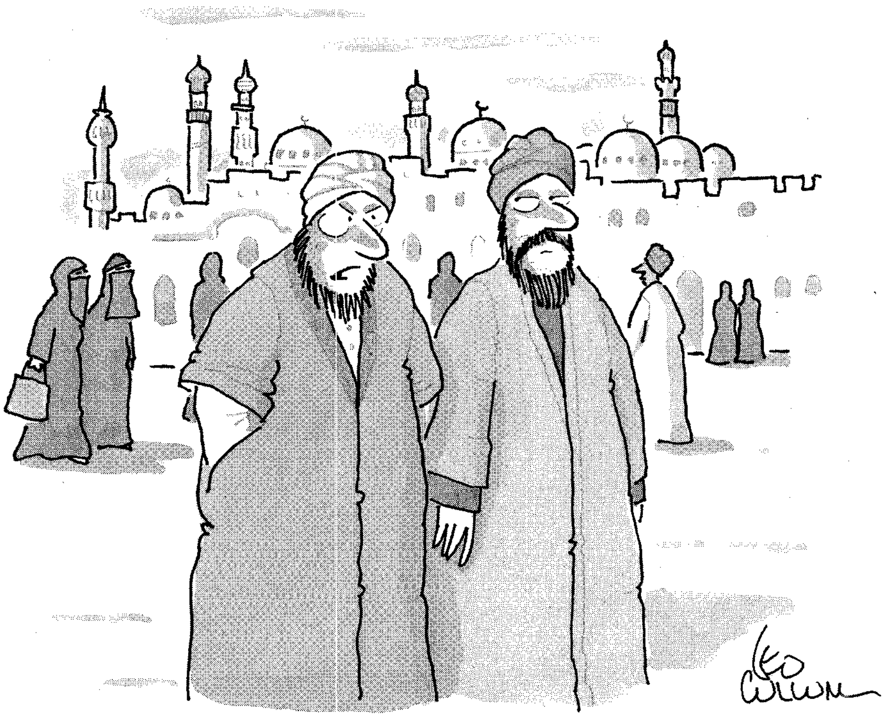
The list of targeted prosecutors changed several times as various interested parties became involved, but it was finally approved by the White House. On November 15, 2006, Sampson issued a five-step plan for how the firings were to be carried out. Step 3, "Prepare to Withstand Political Upheaval," provided responses to anticipated questions from soon-to-be-indignant prosecutors. ("Why me? The Administration is grateful for your service, but wants to give someone else the chance to serve in your district.") On December 19th, Sampson wrote an e-mail to a White House aide about replacing the respected Bud Cummins, the U.S. Attorney in Arkansas, with Timothy Griffin, a former opposition researcher for the Republican Party and an aide to Rove, who had relatively little prosecutorial experience. (Cummins, who had been asked to resign months earlier, finally did so the following day.) The cynicism and short-sightedness of all this was made explicit when, in the e-mail, Sampson speculated whether Griffin's case was the best one with which to "test drive" a provision that had been quietly inserted into the renewed Patriot Act, making it possible to bypass the Senate confirmation process. But "if we don't ever exercise it then what's the point of having it?" he wrote. "All of this should be done in 'good faith,' of course." Last week, the Senate, belatedly objecting to the sneak attack on its authority, voted to revoke the provision.

Karl Rove has been frank about using every available tool—most important, the war on terror—to establish Bush's Presidential legacy, and about his master plan to entrench Republicans in state and national office. A key component of that plan was to insure Republican victories in close elections. As Justice Department e-mails reveal, the Administration focussed on voter fraud and immigration as two areas where Democrats could be vulnerable, and prosecutors were expected to do their part.

The example of former U.S. Attorney David Iglesias, of New Mexico—one of the dismissed prosecutors—is particularly telling. In 2004, Iglesias developed a task force to investigate voter fraud. It looked into a hundred allegations, but ultimately did not find any cases worth prosecuting. Angered by the claim that he was asked to leave because he wasn't up to the job, Iglesias wrote in a *Times* Op-Ed piece last week that he had conducted the most prominent political-corruption prosecutions in New Mexico history and had a record number of prosecutions and a conviction rate of ninety-five per cent. Nevertheless, Pete Domenici, New Mexico's Republican senator, repeatedly called the Attorney General's office to complain about him. Last October, Iglesias says, Domenici called him at home, to ask whether he was going to file indictments before the November elections in any of the corruption cases he was looking into that involved local Democrats. Several weeks later, at a White House holiday party, New Mexico's state Republican Party chairman, Allen Weh, mentioned Iglesias to Rove, and, according to Weh, Rove said, "He's gone." Iglesias was told to resign, along with Daniel Bogden, Paul Charlton, Carol Lam, John McKay, Margaret Chiara, and Kevin Ryan, on December 7, 2006.

Almost four years ago, Karl Rove was asked, in a Profile for this magazine by Nicholas Lemann, whether it was possible to kill the Democratic Party. "I don't think you ever kill any political party," Rove replied. "But do you *weaken* a political party, either by turning what they see as assets into liabilities, and/or by taking issues they consider to be theirs, and raiding them? Absolutely!" Bush's Presidency has been defined by the war on terror, but not in the ways that Rove intended: nonexistent W.M.D.s, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, Gonzales's acquiescence in memos condoning forms of interrogation outlawed by the Geneva Conventions, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation. Today, Gonzales has the support of few Republicans except the President. Rove, who once boasted of a permanent Republican majority, is facing a subpoena from a Democratic Congress. The Bush Administration is struggling to regain the trust of the American public and to avoid a constitutional showdown over executive power—something it never, ever expected.

—*Dorothy Wickenden*



"My authority was never questioned before it was revealed that my middle name is Hillary."

HELL NO DEPT.
BUS RIDE

At 5:30 A.M. one recent Saturday, twenty or so people stood huddled in the northeast corner of Union Square. They were waiting for buses that would take them to Washington, D.C., for a protest at the Pentagon, timed to coincide with the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and, more or less, with the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 March on the Pentagon. Among those gathered were members of the pro-impeachment organization World Can't

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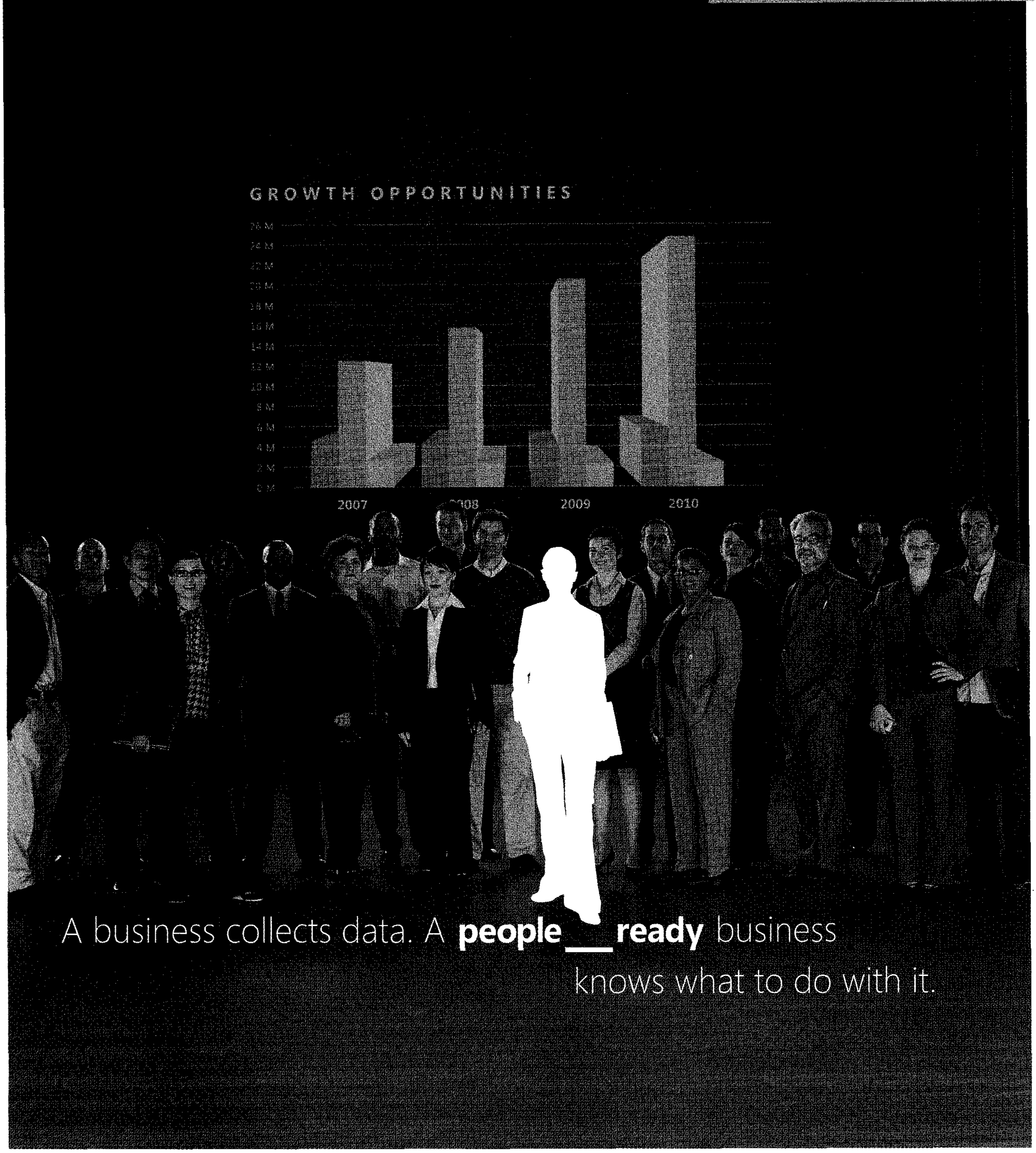
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Wait (which had chartered two buses), some Revolutionary Communists, and a contingent from Students for a Democratic Society—this final group being remarkable because, until last year, it had been dormant for nearly four decades.

The two founders of the reborn S.D.S., Pat Korte, a freshman at the New School, and Jessica Rapchik, a freshman at Antioch College, met as high-school students. "We read the Port Huron Statement, and that resounded with us so much," Rapchik recalled. At Union Square, they chatted with several students about their predawn breakfasts. "I think I ate somebody's leftover Chinese food," someone said. Korte had just spent a night in jail, after "occupying" an Army recruiting office on Chambers Street. ("It's the third time I've been in jail," he said later.) Everyone fidgeted to stay warm.

At around five-forty-five, several teen-agers carrying large red banners arrived. "They're Commies," one of the S.D.S. group said. "They're so cute." The protesters clustered around an organizer named Tony, who was collecting bus money (student fare: ten dollars). He announced, "If you're cold, you can wait at the Starbucks." People cheered and headed over. A lanky student named Matt De Vlieger said, "This place is rocking. You know, at the last big march on the Pentagon Abbie Hoffman tried to levitate the building."

By six-thirty, the buses had arrived. Korte sat in the back row of one, gazed out the window, and said, "I got kicked off a bus in the fourth grade." He had just completed his political-science midterm. His hair was unruly. His feet were cold. This was spring break. De Vlieger sat beside him and prepared to nap. Before shutting his eyes, he said, "The Danish girls are here. That's bliss."

A New School student named Lucas came down the aisle. "Hey, can I join you guys?" he asked.

"I was saving those seats for the Danish girls," De Vlieger said. Lucas sat down anyway.

"If any of you are cranky, that's O.K.," Tony said over the P.A. A passenger called out, "Turn up the bass!" The bus headed down Seventh Avenue and through the Holland Tunnel, but just before the first toll booth it pulled over. "So heat is a good thing," Tony announced. "We're going to switch to another bus, one with heat." By East Brunswick, on the replacement bus, jackets and scarves had come off, and heads began to nod.

After an hour or so, Tony turned on the microphone. "We need a plan to impeach Bush for war crimes," he said. The bus was approaching Wilmington. People were groggy. Korte stood and declared, "This Administration wants to radically remake society, and we need to counter that with our own radical vision." Rapchik stood and said, "We need to have a critique of capitalism." A woman called out, "Bush is just a freakin' molecule."

By twelve-thirty, the bus had reached the edge of the Mall. The Washington Monument was in full view.

"I feel like that thing should have lasers on top of it."

"It's kind of nice here—there's a lot of grass."

A posse of counter-protesters was waiting at the drop-off point.

"That sign—'Stop the War on Troop Morale.' I just love that."

"They're like, 'We're fighting for your right to protest—so go home!' "

"We should infiltrate them!"

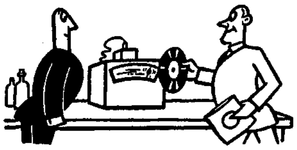
"Hey, are you O.K.?"

Rapchik was lying in the aisle, carsick, but eventually she roused herself. Outside, the sky was blue. Beyond the placards of the counter-protesters ("Commie, Traitor, Bitch"), the antiwar march heaved toward the Pentagon. Korte and Rapchik fell in behind a pudgy S.D.S. member wearing a checkered kaffiyeh. He was shouting into a megaphone, "*Tell* me what democracy looks like!" And the crowd was telling him, "*This* is what democracy looks like!"

—*Raffi Khatchadourian*

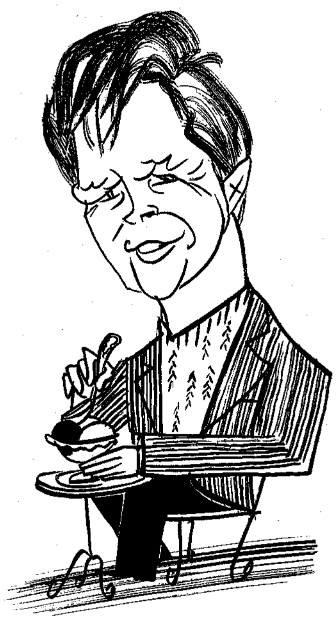
LOOKING BACK

THE MAN WHO WAS THERE



Every year or so, the record producer Joe Boyd stops in at Caffe Dante, on MacDougal Street, for a pistachio gelato. It's a matter less of nostalgia than of taste. "I can only like what I like," he said the other day, during one of these visits. He was spooning up gelato but talking about music, which is his bailiwick, if it's anybody's. "I've always had the arrogance to feel that what I liked would still be around in thirty or forty or fifty years, and that what other people liked might not."

Boyd was occasionally wrong, but more often right. Trusting his ear, he earned a reputation as a producer's producer, and a sense of himself as a chronic near-misser. (He passed up a chance to sign Abba and produced Pink Floyd's first single, only to be cast aside when the band got a big record deal.) Boyd discovered, produced, and managed such highly regarded and intermittently overlooked British acts as Fairport Convention (and Richard Thompson), Nick Drake, and the Incredible String Band. He has worked with R.E.M., Maria Muldaur, John Martyn, and the McGarrigles, and was a world-music pioneer. He has also sprouted up, Waldo-like, in one watershed moment after another. When Bob Dylan went electric, at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, Boyd was the production manager; you can blame him (Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, and Theo Bikel did, anyway) for Dylan's playing so loud.



Joe Boyd

Boyd, who is sixty-four, grew up in Princeton, a kid collector of old jazz and blues records. His first booking was the bluesman Lonnie Johnson, whom he and a friend found in the Philadelphia phone book. They drove him up to Princeton for a gig in a friend's living room. Boyd went to Harvard, where he got caught up in the Cambridge folk scene, a rival to New York's. (On one occasion, a girl with whom he expected to spend the night left a note in her apartment: "Dear Joe. Sorry, change of plans." He awoke on her couch to the smell of bacon and the presence, at the kitchen table, of his replacement. His consolation: a "monosyllabic breakfast" with Bob Dylan.) Before long, he was managing jazz and blues tours (Muddy Waters, the Reverend Gary Davis, Roland Kirk), running a psychedelic club (the U.F.O., in London), and starting a production company (Witchseason) and a record label (Hannibal).

He gave up producing music after losing control of Hannibal, in 2001, and began writing a memoir. "White Bicycles: Making Music in the Nineteen-Sixties" was published in the U.K. last year, and it is being released in the States next week. "One of the things I'm enjoying at the moment is that I'm managing a performer who does everything I tell him to," he said.

At Caffe Dante, Boyd had on gray flannels, an old green sweater, and a corduroy jacket. A wicked cough belied the fact that, among his contemporaries (many of whom are, of course, dead), he has maintained an exceptional keenness of health. He has lived in London, more or less, since 1965, a self-described preppy Yank among the dandies, rogues, and barrow boys, but he has had his New York episodes. He remembered coming upon Defunkt, Joe Bowie's punk-era funk-jazz ensemble, in 1979 at a Hungarian avant-garde theatre in Chelsea called Squat. He signed the group to his label. "Joe Bowie and one of the Hungarian guys wrote these fantastic songs," Boyd recalled. "English by a guy who doesn't speak English. Lyrics like 'You are strangling me with your love in your hotel room of permanent disorder.'

"I have a feeling that New York was a better music place in the past than it is now," he said. "And London is in some ways better," owing mainly to the presence of musicians from exotic parts of the world. "But New York is fundamentally a much more serious music place than London. The thing about English musicians is that there's not a tradition of playing, of jamming. There's some terrible legislation there forcing licenses on pubs. The tradition of the bar with a band doing covers, or whatever—that doesn't exist. In England, you have people at home figuring things out in their studios. It's a concoction, more than it is here."

Boyd's tolerance these days for rock and roll is fairly low; he's more likely to go to see Wayne Shorter or some Nigerian fuji. "The older I get, the more sensitive I am to rhythm," he said. "In the sixties, rock and roll was this whole new room that had been opened, in which white people were playing with African-American traditions, and nobody had really done it before. There were huge amounts of floor space. A kid today walking into that room, all the space is taken."

Over the speakers at Caffe Dante, Frankie Valli was singing "Grease." Boyd did some heavy coughing and unwrapped a lozenge.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

FIELD TRIP
SMART COOKIES

It is sometimes suggested that schools no longer teach children values, but this assertion would not be true of P.S. 321, in Park Slope, which has been offering an "Ad-Busters" class as an after-school program, intended to impart radical skepticism to kindergartners. The class is taught by Susan Gregory Thomas, a P.S. 321 parent and the author of "Buy, Buy Baby," a soon-to-be-published exposé of the depredations of kiddie consumer culture. One recent very cold Friday, Thomas's charges were crowded around a lunch table in the cafeteria in advance of a field trip to Key Food.

"Who goes shopping with their parents?" Thomas, who has brown curly hair and was wearing a pastel-colored jacket trimmed with fake fur, asked.

Walter, whose lips bore faint traces of blue that might have been caused by food coloring (unlikely) or marker pen (probable), said, "I sometimes go to Met Foods, or D'Agostino's."

Ishai, who was eating a bag of Pirate's Booty, said, "I go to the Food Co-op." Thomas asked if Pirate's Booty was healthy. "It's snacky," Ishai said.

"How do we know when something is healthy?" Thomas asked.

"From reading the nutrients list," Ishai said.

"I can't read," Walter said, pulling on a fleece hat.

The children headed down Seventh Avenue holding hands in boy-girl pairs: their choice. The group passed Back to the Land Natural Foods and the D'Vine Taste fancy-food emporium.

"There's the wine market!" a boy named James said.

"I want to take off my coat, I want to take off my hat, I want to take off my shoes, I want to take off my pants, I want to take off my underwear!" Walter was saying as he entered the supermarket. Once inside, he yelled, "I want candy!"

The children milled around a bin filled with bananas, blocking the efforts of a middle-aged man to navigate his shopping cart beyond Fruit. "I know what this is," Walter said, momentarily dispirited. "It's the grownup aisle."

As the group rounded the corner into Canned Goods, a quiet boy named Charlie reached for a pack of soy chips. "We're not buying those, Charlie," Charlie's dad, a parental monitor, said. "You had those for snack." Thomas halted in front of an array of Campbell's soups, pointing out that the packaging on many of the cans featured cartoon characters. "Leave the cans of soup on the shelf," Charlie's dad warned, as Charlie picked up two cans—bearing Chicken & Stars and Goldfish labels—and knocked over a display of pickle jars.

"Does anyone know what saturated fats are?" Thomas asked. "If you ate three of these cans in a day, you would be over the fat limit for a child of your age. You would have to say, 'I'm sorry, I can't have the cupcakes and the cookies.' "

A boy named Sam looked dubious. "I don't even like soup," he said.

Further along the aisle were packages of mix for macaroni and cheese. "Would you choose this one, or the one without characters?" asked Thomas, holding a box featuring Shrek.

"I'd choose the plain one," Maeve, who had blond hair and was just getting over a cold, said. "Shrek is bad for you."

"Why is all the macaroni and cheese orange?" Thomas asked.

"Food coloring!" Ishai said, dropping

dramatically to the tiled floor and picking himself up.

"Who is it aimed at?" Thomas asked.

"Kids!" Ishai answered, dropping to the floor again.

In the cereal aisle, James, who was wearing a white Power Rangers cap, grabbed a box of Fruity Pebbles. "That's 'The Flintstones,'" he said. "That's a very old show."

Thomas picked up a box of Health Valley granola and asked, "What does 'organic' mean?"

"It means it's organized," a boy named Henry said. An older gentleman who was carrying a tub of Quaker Oats paused to listen. "You wonder why people are dying of heart attacks every day," he said. "The corporations are running America and poisoning Americans, and the people don't realize it. The politicians are paid off to let them kill people."

Thomas ushered the children past Paper Products and back outside, where a truck decorated with a Canada Dry logo and covered with wintry ice was making a delivery.

"Icicles!" Walter shouted.

"Icicles aren't packaged!" Ishai said.

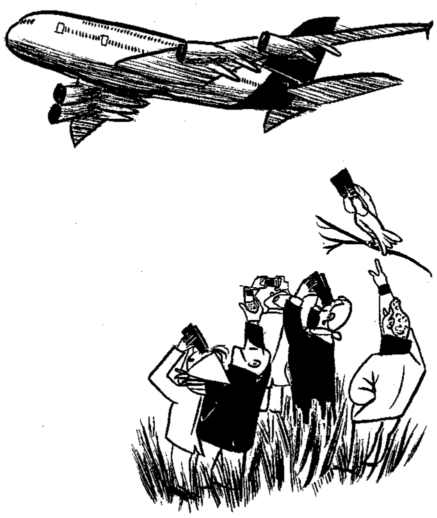
"You can't eat icicles," a wary Maeve warned. None of the children expressed a desire for ginger ale.

—Rebecca Mead

UP IN THE SKY DEPT.
RARE BIRD

For all its eccentricities, bird-watching is a respectable hobby, practiced by psychiatrists, kings, and forty-six million Americans. But plane spotting—which also entails tramping around swamps to watch flying objects—somehow lacks the same cachet.

Phil Derner, Jr., the president of the Web site NYCAviation.com, estimates that there are fifty active plane spotters in the New York City area. At noon last Monday, nearly all of them were gathered, telephoto lenses in hand, in North Woodmere Park, which is situated at the head of Jamaica Bay and beneath the flight path to Runway 22 Left at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The occasion: the maiden arrival, from Frankfurt, of the double-decker Airbus A380, the largest passenger plane in the world. (It was on a promotional and "route-proving" trip organized by Airbus and Lufthansa.) During its development, the A380 had been trouble for Airbus, with production delays resulting in cancelled orders and layoffs. But the Airbus is big and she is rare, and that is more than enough to bring out a crowd of plane geeks.



Plane Spotters

A tenth grader named Matt—he asked that his last name not be used, since he was skipping school—had travelled from Westchester with his father, a lawyer. "I think the A380 is a landmark in aviation," Matt said, explaining why he had come. "My mom was really against the idea."

"It's his passion," his father said. "We were struggling for a while, because he wants to be a pilot, and we want him to be an engineer. We have only one kid, so a pilot seems kind of, you know." Matt recently started taking an online course in Danish, to prepare himself for a job with Scandinavian Airlines. "They have a really good fleet, a lot of long-range A330s and A340s," he said, before excusing himself to watch a Singapore Airlines 747-400 on its final approach.

The spotters had been nervous for days. J.F.K. has four runways, some as long as fourteen thousand feet, which can be used in either direction. That means dozens of spotting sites, some miles apart, and it wouldn't be possible to know in advance which runway the Airbus would use. "The thing that will suck is that if we are at N. Woodmere, and they decide to send him to 31L or 31R," someone had written on the group's message board.

But Monday dawned cold and clear, with a steady south wind, making Runway 22 Left nearly a sure thing. At least the spotters would be spared assembling near 31 Right, behind the Costco on Rockaway Turnpike, whose manager had recently been clamping down on the aviation enthusiasm in his parking lot.

When Lufthansa Flight 8940 Super finally checked in, from somewhere above the Hamptons, the crowd at Woodmere roared in delight. Over a radio scanner, the German pilot pronounced it "zooper."

At twelve-ten, the plane was cleared to land. John Toomey, a retired Catholic-school principal from Howard Beach, chewed on a cigar and reminisced. "The Concorde used to leave a mist of jet fuel," he said. "I wouldn't smoke for a couple of hours." Then a white speck appeared low on the horizon, with four engines and a telltale curve to its wings, like a child's drawing of a bird.

"That's it—the super jumbo!" Andy Lomasky, a consultant from Long Island, yelled. The giant white plane passed across the sky from right to left. There were giggles, then silence. A pair of geese took off from the reeds, and an oven-size piece of ice floated by. Then the A380's massive blue tail—five stories high—sank behind a few trees, onto the runway and out of view.

The spotters were quiet for a moment. "I don't want to be Mr. Damp, but it was a bit anticlimactic," said Geoff Cook, who had driven down for the day from Rhode Island, and who grew up beneath the approach path to Luton Airport, outside London.

"It's a prettier plane than I thought it would be," Lynda Smith, a flight attendant from Long Island, said. "This is just one of those events that you've got to watch. It's so simple. We came, we saw, we went home."

A little later, Bob Lieber, the president of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, greeted the A380 on behalf of Mayor Bloomberg, at a press conference in Terminal 1. He had heard nothing of the other welcoming committee. "What's a plane spotter?" he asked. "What are they looking for?"

—Andrew Blum

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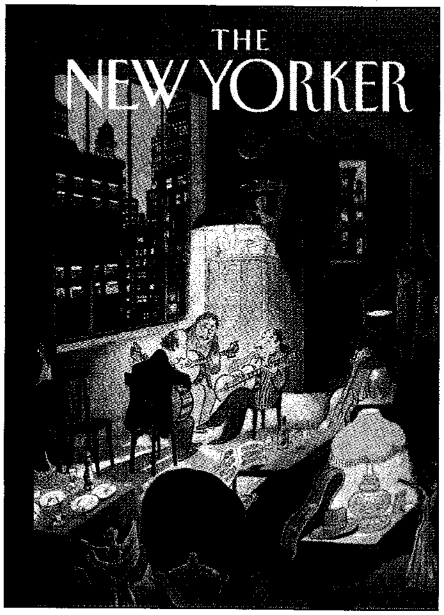

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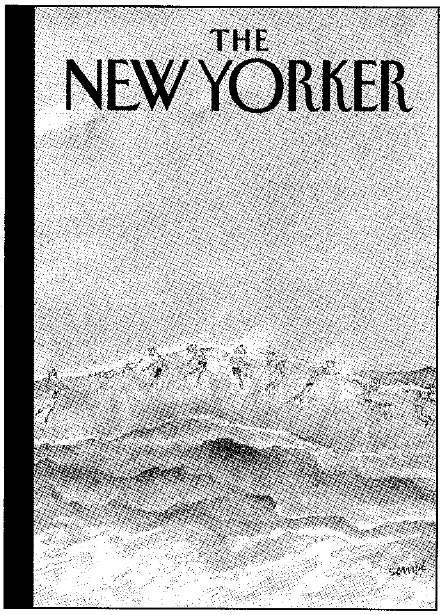

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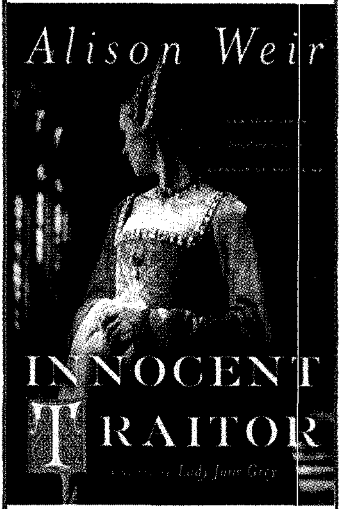

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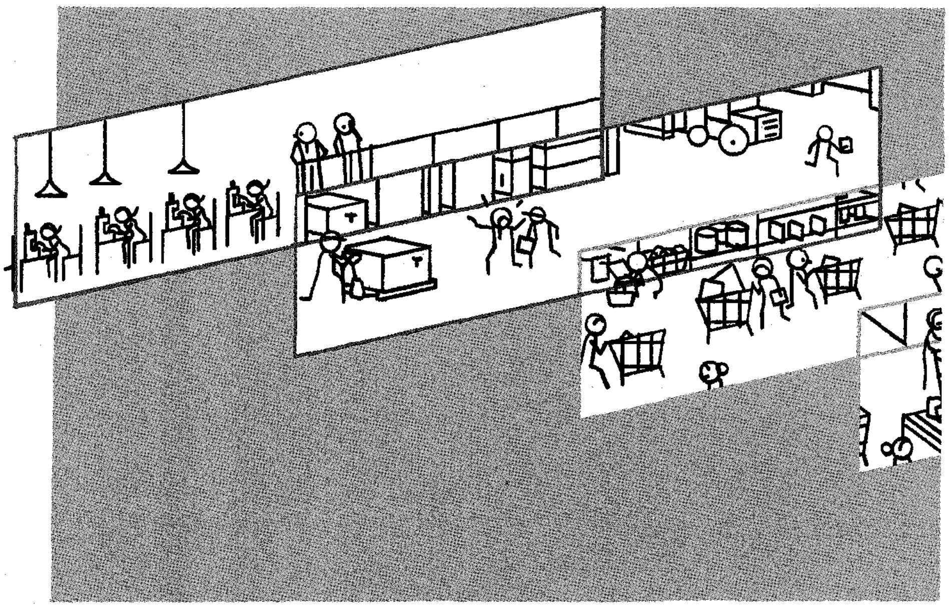
ANNALS OF SPIN

SELLING WAL-MART

Can the company co-opt liberals?

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG



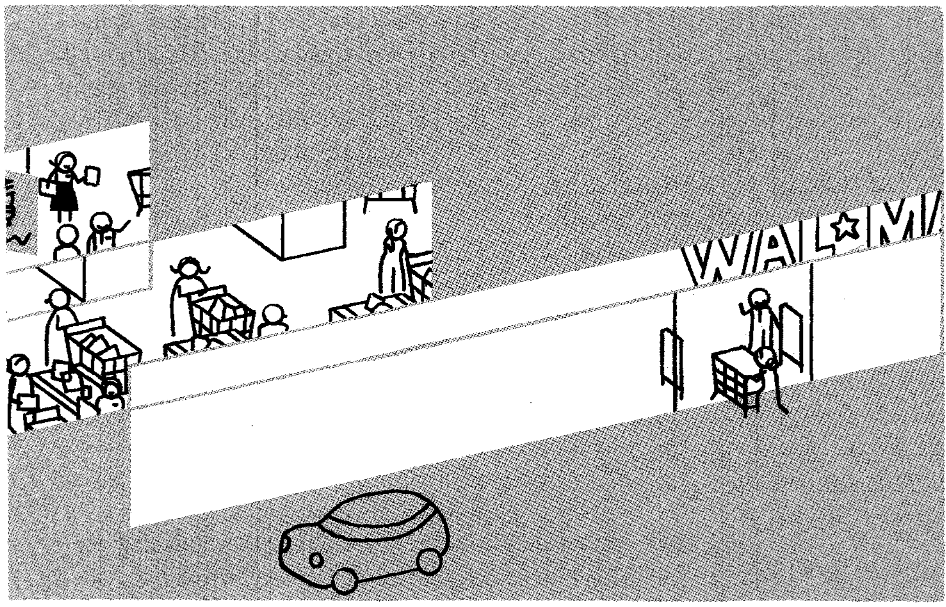
Wal-Mart has hired Democratic P.R. experts to help improve its reputation on such issu

LAURENT CILLUFFO

On the second floor of Wal-Mart's headquarters, in Bentonville, Arkansas, is a windowless room called Action Alley. In the Wal-Mart idiom, the term "Action Alley" usually refers to the main aisle of the company's two thousand Supercenters—the stores that have upended the retail business by selling enormous quantities of groceries and imported goods at prices that competitors find difficult or impossible to match. At the "home office," as Bentonville is known, Action Alley is the company's war room, a communications center that was set up and is staffed by Washington-based operatives from Edelman, a public-relations firm that advises companies on issues of "reputation management." Wal-Mart corporate culture is parsimonious except in the matter of executive compensation, but, according to a source, the company has been paying Edelman roughly ten million dollars annually to renovate its reputation.

Twenty years ago, Wal-Mart was widely viewed as a scrappy regional retailer, and its founder, Sam Walton, an Ozarks eccentric with a vision of superdiscounting, was praised for intuiting the needs of his customers, and for maintaining high morale among his workers. When Walton retired, in 1988 (he died in 1992), the company had revenues of sixteen billion dollars. Today, Wal-Mart is the second-largest company in the world in terms of revenue—only ExxonMobil is bigger. Its revenues last year came to more than three hundred and fifteen billion dollars, with profits of more than eleven billion, and it has developed a reputation as a worldwide colossus that provides poor pay and miserly benefits to its 1.8 million employees. The image of the company is not helped by the immoderation of Sam Walton's widow and children, who together control forty per cent of Wal-Mart's outstanding shares, and who are worth roughly eighty billion dollars; they are, by a striking margin, the richest family in America. (They are worth more than Warren Buffett and Bill Gates combined.)

Wal-Mart is traditionally a Republican-leaning company (during the past fifteen years, more than seventy-five per cent of its political donations have gone to Republicans) and has become a favorite target of Democratic politicians. Hillary Clinton, who once served on Wal-Mart’s board, recently returned a five-thousand-dollar donation because of what a campaign spokeswoman said were “serious differences with current company practices.” Barack Obama and John Edwards have joined union-led campaigns to denounce the company for its wage-and-benefit policies. Wal-Mart is notably unfriendly to unions; in 2000, when meat-cutters at a single Wal-Mart in Texas organized into a collective-bargaining unit, Wal-Mart responded by shutting down its meat counters across Texas and in five neighboring states. It closed an entire store in Quebec, rather than see workers unionize.



s low wages, miserly benefits, sex discrimination, and union busting.

The company has also been criticized for driving American jobs overseas, by demanding immense discounts from its suppliers. Senator Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat who is one of Wal-Mart’s main foes in Congress, says that the company, by forcing its suppliers to manufacture goods in China, shows that it “doesn’t stand for American values.” Wal-Mart has been the subject of numerous unflattering documentaries and books. Even Ron Galloway, the maker of a recent pro-Wal-Mart documentary, “Why Wal-Mart Works and Why That Makes Some People Crazy,” has turned against the company. Galloway told me that he now considers Wal-Mart to be a “heartless” employer. “They just instituted a wage cap for long-term employees—people making between thirteen and eighteen dollars an hour. It’s a form of accelerated attrition. They can’t expect me to defend that,” Galloway said.

Two unions—the Service Employees International Union and the United Food and Commercial Workers—fund anti-Wal-Mart lobbying groups that catalogue what they see as the company’s diverse sins. Each month seems to bring a new, self-inflicted embarrassment. Most recently, Wal-Mart announced that it had fired a technician from its Threat Research and Analysis division (which combats industrial espionage) for eavesdropping on telephone calls made by the *Times*’ Wal-Mart beat reporter, Michael Barbaro. Wal-Mart claims that the technician acted alone; the U.S. Attorney in Arkansas is investigating.

In 2005, Barbaro and another *Times* reporter, Steven Greenhouse, cited an internal memo written by the company’s chief human-resources executive, M. Susan Chambers, in which she suggested that the company could control personnel costs by not hiring unhealthy people. (To keep the sick and the lame off the payroll, Chambers suggested that all jobs should include “some physical activity; e.g., all cashiers do some cart-gathering.”) In the same memo, Chambers noted that forty-six per cent of the children of Wal-Mart’s million-plus American employees were uninsured or on Medicaid.

More recently, the company experienced a run of bad publicity when it announced new scheduling policies for its store workers (known as “associates”). Under what critics call the “open availability” policy, workers must make themselves available for different shifts from month to month or risk losing hours. Kathleen MacDonald, a cosmetics-counter manager at a Wal-Mart in Aiken, South Carolina, explained to me, “It’s simple. They say you have to be there when the computer says the customers will be there. So if you have kids at home you can’t show up, but then your hours are being cut.”

The company is facing more consequential challenges over its treatment of women. A class-action lawsuit filed in San Francisco in 2001 by six female Wal-Mart employees, alleging that the company has denied promotions and equal pay to women, is proceeding steadily to trial; by some estimates, the suit could cost the company as much as five billion dollars. Wal-Mart has denied that it discriminates against women. Kathleen MacDonald joined the suit after she learned that a male counterpart, who, like her, was stocking shelves, earned more than she did. When she raised the issue, she told me, “my immediate supervisor said, ‘Well, God made Adam first, and Eve came from him.’ I was, like, what? That’s when I decided enough was enough.”

Full-time hourly workers at Wal-Mart stores make an average of $10.51 an hour, according to the company. Wal-Mart’s most energetic adversary, a group called Wake Up Wal-Mart, which is sponsored by the food workers’ union, notes that $10.51 may be the average full-time wage, but the company won’t disclose the average hourly wage of part-timers. “We think the true average is probably less than nine dollars,” Chris Kofinis, the Wake Up Wal-Mart spokesman, said.

The company has had its bright moments, most notably in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when Wal-Mart mobilized its truck fleet to deliver goods to the storm zone. But that was a rare instance of good public relations. Owing in part to its status as a retail behemoth, Wal-Mart has met with resistance in numerous communities (including New York City) when it has tried to open stores. And its recent business performance has been less than stellar; sales have slowed, and the stock price is stagnant. Problems like these have concentrated the minds of Lee Scott, Wal-Mart's C.E.O., and his top executives. "We used to be the David and now we're seen as the Goliath," John Fleming, the company's chief merchandising officer, told me.

The job of the Edelman people—there are about twenty, along with more than three dozen in-house public-relations specialists—is to help Wal-Mart scrub its muddied image. Edelman specializes in helping industries with image problems; another important client is the American Petroleum Institute, a Washington lobbying group that seeks to convince Americans that oil companies care about the environment and that their profits are reasonable. Edelman does its work by cultivating contacts among the country's opinion élites, with whom it emphasizes the good news and spins the bad; by such tactics as establishing "Astroturf" groups, seemingly grass-roots organizations that are actually fronts for industry; and, as I deduced from my own visit to Bentonville, by advising corporate executives on how to speak like risk-averse politicians.

It became clear to me in Bentonville that Wal-Mart's senior executives had been tightly scripted. When I talked with John Menzer, a company vice-chairman, a spokeswoman named Sarah Clark, my official escort there, told me that the conversation would be limited to the company's new Jobs and Opportunity Zones concept, which is designed to help smooth the arrival of new stores in urban areas. (A company source told me that the Zones idea was intended by Edelman as a public-relations maneuver to soften Wal-Mart's image among minority communities; the entire budget for the program is five hundred thousand dollars over two years.) Menzer, a slender man with a thin smile, explained the company's attraction to underemployed inner-city residents, saying, "One of the biggest opportunities a person has at Wal-Mart is to be part of this growth company. There are always opportunities for promotion, learning, and education, and people know they can build a career here."

When I asked about the "open availability" policy, Clark interrupted, while Menzer stared at me. "I can certainly take that one," Clark said. "I'll make a note of that. We'll talk about that later. We don't have 'open availability.'" Menzer continued as if the question had not been asked. "Now we're expanding outside our four walls to invest in the community, so let me add that in as another step we're taking," he said. (Sometime later, Clark suggested that I interview an employee about flexible scheduling, and she provided the name and number of one who would talk to me: Latoya Machato, a cashier at a Texas Supercenter. I called the store and asked for Machato, but was told that "cashiers can't come to the phone during work." I called later and was told that Machato could speak to me on her break, but would not be allowed to call long-distance from a company phone. I asked Clark if Machato could talk to me after her shift, but Clark said that that would be impossible, because the store would have to put her "on the clock," and thus file the paperwork to get her paid an extra hour's wage.)

The Edelman team assigned to Wal-Mart, I learned, is divided into three groups: "promote," "response," and "pressure." The Jobs and Opportunity Zones notion came from the promotions team. The response-team members—veterans of political campaigns—are supposed to quickly counter criticism in the press or on the Web. The pressure group works on opposition research, focussing on the unions and the press.

There is great mistrust of the press at Wal-Mart headquarters. The chief spokeswoman for the company, a former A.T.&T. executive named Mona Williams, keeps on a shelf a framed cover of a 2003 issue of *Business Week* featuring a story titled "Is Wal-Mart Too Powerful?" The story asked tough questions about Wal-Mart's influence on the American economy. "I keep that there to remind me never to trust reporters," she said, without smiling. Sarah Clark was friendlier, but similarly suspicious. It was Clark who, without enthusiasm, brought me to Action Alley for a brief glimpse inside.

Before opening the door, she instructed me not to write down anything I saw—the third time that this particular directive had been issued. In some ways, the home office is not unlike the headquarters of the National Security Agency—both contain a large number of windowless rooms and both are staffed by people who are preoccupied by the movement of strangers in their midst. The N.S.A.'s headquarters, though, seemed to me more aesthetically appealing; the Wal-Mart home office resembles a poorly funded elementary school. Wal-Mart executives take pride in their ostentatiously shabby surroundings. "When I was working internationally, I got to be friends with Henry Kissinger, and so I invited Henry to have lunch with us," Menzer told me. "We had lunch in the Quail Room, and it's got pictures of Sam Walton and all his bird hunting, and we handed out Subway sandwiches and said, 'Well, you're very special, so we threw in a bag of chips,' and I daresay I don't know if he ever saw a Subway sandwich before, but he was actually so impressed that we live our culture."

I pointed out to Menzer that his salary would allow him to purchase something more elegant. His face clouded over. "I'm just not going to talk about that," he said. In 2005, Menzer earned six and a half million dollars in salary, bonuses, and options.

Clark opened the door of Action Alley to reveal a dark, threadbare room, its walls, like most of Wal-Mart's walls, painted battleship gray. Six desks were clustered at the center of the room, and at these desks sat five Edelman executives.

When the presence of a reporter was announced, three of the executives looked away and two stood up to greet me. One was Greg St. Claire, at the moment the senior Edelman employee there. St. Claire, who is about forty and is a former Republican congressional staff member, got Wal-Mart in some trouble last year, because of a group called Working Families for Wal-Mart, which advertised itself as a "grass-roots" organization. St. Claire was one of the forces behind Working Families for Wal-Mart, which paid for his sister, Laura St. Claire, to travel across America in a recreational vehicle and keep a blog about visits with Wal-Mart employees. Everyone she talked to was delighted with Wal-Mart. At about the time that the trip came to an end, *Business Week* revealed that Wal-Mart had financed the journey. When I asked Richard Edelman, the company's chairman, about this rather blatant example of Astroturfing, he said, of Working Families for Wal-Mart, "I do believe that it is a real group of real people, as far as I know."

Working Families for Wal-Mart is housed in Edelman's Washington office; its steering-committee members, some of whom have business ties to the company, were recruited by Edelman. They include the singer Pat Boone, who told me by e-mail that he volunteered his public-relations services to Wal-Mart several years ago, and Wal-Mart passed his name on to the group.

Greg St. Claire was not interested in talking to me, but the other Edelman executive stood up and said hello. He was a man of about thirty named Fred Baldassaro. I was surprised to see him. We had last crossed paths more than a year earlier, in a union hall in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At the time, Baldassaro was working for the Democratic National Committee chairman, Howard Dean, as his top travelling aide. Dean had spoken about democratic values at a rally, and said, "When you see that you're putting in as many hours as the C.E.O. of your company, and he's making five hundred and thirty-eight times what you're making, do you think capitalism works for you?"

Down some stairs from Action Alley is the office of Lee Scott, Wal-Mart's president and C.E.O., who last year earned $15.7 million in salary and bonuses. Early this month, the company announced that it was granting him an additional twenty-two million dollars in stock. In the past year, Scott earned roughly two thousand times the salary of the average Wal-Mart worker.

Sarah Clark was eager to move along, but I asked Baldassaro why he went from Dean's Democratic National Committee to Scott's Wal-Mart.

"Well, it's interesting here," he said. "I'm getting married soon, anyway, and, you know . . ." He trailed off, as Clark invited me to leave.

Later that day, I drove to a Wal-Mart Supercenter in the nearby town of Rogers with one of Clark's deputies, a young New Yorker named David Tovar, who, before joining Wal-Mart, spent nine years as a spokesman and lobbyist for Philip Morris, including a stint arguing against government regulation of cigarettes. He explained his position: "It's a legal product that adults can choose to use, or not use, as they see fit. I learned a lot by doing that sort of work." As we drove out of Bentonville, I asked Tovar if he thought it odd to find ostensibly pro-labor Democrats at the headquarters of Wal-Mart. In fact, he said, it would be quite normal for Democrats to join Wal-Mart's "cause," because Wal-Mart's customers are the Party's natural constituency.

Wal-Mart's executives are angry about Democratic attacks on the company. Tovar's boss, Mona Williams, told me, "Wal-Mart is taking care of the people the Democratic Party says it represents—the poor, the middle class. The Democrats are not taking care of them. We're like Lyndon Johnson's Great Society."

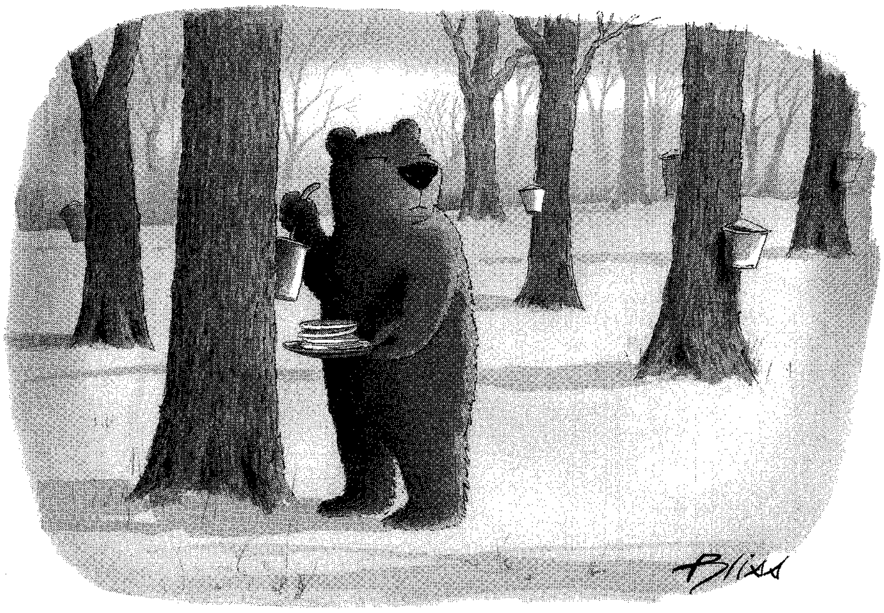
Tovar offered a more self-interested explanation for his service in the public-relations industry: "Why did I go work for Philip Morris? Because I wanted to get out of my parents' house. Why do people take jobs? It's like in 'Thank You for Smoking'"—Christopher Buckley's satire of the Washington public-relations industry. "What do they all say in that book? 'I've got to pay the mortgage.' You know, everybody's got to pay the mortgage."

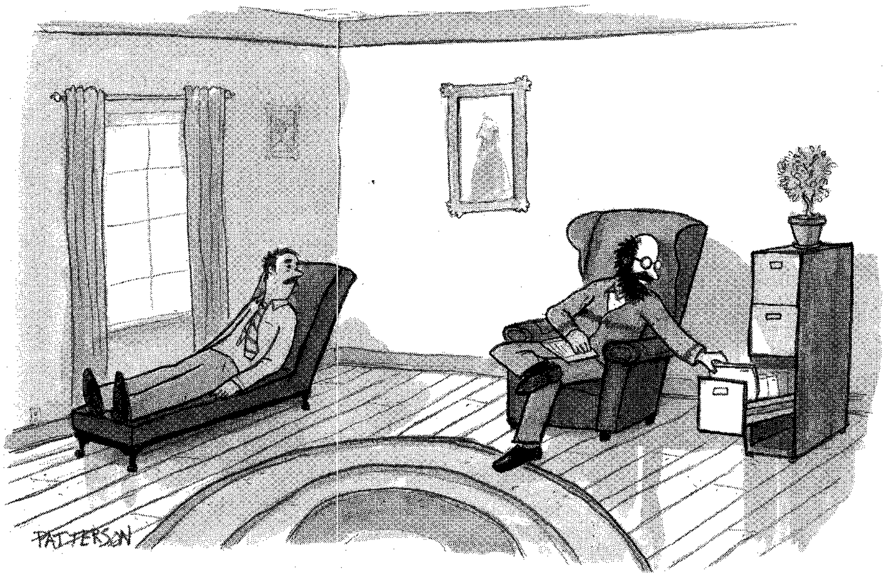
In another novel, Buckley devoted a chapter to the exploits of a fictional White House advance man named Leslie R. Dach. "His motto was 'Get the fuck out of my way,'" Buckley writes of Dach. "Leslie was serene in his contempt for fools, a category which in his view included most of humanity."

Buckley borrowed Dach's name from an actual Leslie Dach, who was his roommate at Yale, and who, thirty years later, remains a close friend. The real Dach also worked in Presidential politics—first as an advance man for Senator Edward Kennedy in his failed run for the nomination in 1980, and, later, as communications director for Michael Dukakis's campaign in 1988 (a campaign that is still recalled for the moment when Dukakis was photographed, and ridiculed for, wearing a helmet as he rode in a tank). Today, Dach is Wal-Mart's executive vice-president for corporate affairs and government relations. Last year, Lee Scott hired Dach away from Edelman, where, among other duties, he was vice-chairman, and where he managed the Wal-Mart account. "Fresh from his triumph in staging Michael Dukakis's tank ride, it's on to Bentonville," Buckley said to me earlier this month. When I mentioned Buckley's comment to Dach, he demurred: "I was thousands of miles away in my office at that famous moment."

Dach, who is fifty-two, is the son of Holocaust survivors and grew up in Queens. He is wiry, with wavy graying hair and a pointed sense of humor—an improbable addition to the ranks of Wal-Mart's senior managers. He is not as impolitic as his fictional counterpart, although Buckley told me that Dach's friends are "bemused that he ended up in public relations, because, roughly speaking, he was the least tactful person on the planet."

Upon graduating from Yale, Dach worked for a time for the National Audubon Society, and then for the Environ-





"You're not crazy. You want crazy?"

mental Defense Fund, and he became involved in Democratic politics. (He has worked in seven Presidential campaigns.) After the 1988 race, the public-relations expert John Scanlon, who was volunteering on the Dukakis campaign, recommended Dach to Edelman. He went to work there and stayed for seventeen years, interrupted quadrennially for campaigns. In 2000, he managed the program at the Democratic National Convention for the Gore campaign. At Edelman, he did public relations for a range of corporate interests, along with Michael Deaver, Ronald Reagan's former image-maker, who also works for Edelman in Washington.

One of Dach's first big clients was Starkist, a division of Heinz, which was being accused by environmentalists of slaughtering dolphins during tuna harvests. Richard Edelman told me that Dach worked to bring the two sides together, and helped create the dolphin-safe tuna campaign. Dach maintained his ties with the environmental movement throughout his career at Edelman. In 1995, he helped to plan a seminar for petroleum-industry executives on ways to counter the bad publicity that comes with oil spills, while at the same time serving on the board of the National Audubon Society.

Ethical ambidexterity is no barrier to success in the public-relations field, particularly in Washington. Many prominent Democrats spend the years between national elections representing corporate clients: the political consultant Carter Eskew, who has worked for such Democratic politicians as Al Gore and Christopher Dodd, also worked for the tobacco industry; Mike McCurry, the former Clinton White House press secretary, represents the telecommunications industry in its fight against, among others, Democratic bloggers on issues of Internet access. Democrats and Republicans frequently come together to build bipartisan lobbying firms that seek corporate clients; Clinton's onetime counsel Jack Quinn, who had as a client the international fugitive Marc Rich, for whom he helped arrange a Presidential pardon, built a successful firm with Ed Gillespie, the former Republican National Committee chairman.

Dach and Edelman have been innovators in their field. A press release issued in 2000 outlines a strategy that Dach has used repeatedly to good effect. "You've got an environmental disaster on your hands," the document reads. "Have you consulted with Greenpeace in developing your crisis response plan? Co-opting your would-be attackers may seem counterintuitive, but it makes sense when you consider that N.G.O.s (non-governmental organizations) are trusted by the public nearly two to one to 'do what's right' compared with government bodies, media organizations and corporations." The document goes on to describe Amnesty International, the Sierra Club, and the World Wildlife Fund as "brands" that the public believes "do what's right."

Edelman's co-option policy may already be on display at Wal-Mart. Greenpeace has talked with the company about the issue of environmentally sound product packaging, and earlier this year Lee Scott joined Andy Stern, the leader of the Service Employees International Union, in a coalition of businesses and unions calling for quality health care to be made available to all Americans by 2012. Stern, whose union pays for the activities of a group called Wal-Mart Watch, which regularly criticizes the company, told me he did not believe that he had been co-opted by Wal-Mart, but his allies in the labor movement weren't so sure. "Anyone who wants to take health-care lessons from Wal-Mart," Chris Kofinis, of Wake Up Wal-Mart, said, "needs to have a serious reality check." Government-sponsored universal health coverage would, of course, free Wal-Mart and other companies of the burden of providing health insurance for their employees.

Dach declined to take credit for Wal-Mart's foray into the health-care-policy debate, but Richard Edelman suggested that he is seeing Dach's influence on the company. Edelman called Dach an "idealist" who has carried to Wal-Mart his fervor for such traditional Democratic causes as universal health care and environmentalism. "I feel very strongly that Leslie Dach is making a very real contribution to Wal-Mart," he said. "When he left, I didn't get weepy, but I said, 'Go and make a great contribution.'"

Wal-Mart, in turn, is making a great contribution to Dach: he was given three million dollars in stock and a hundred and sixty-eight thousand stock options, in addition to an undisclosed base salary. He and his wife, a nutritionist, recently bought a $2.7-million house in the Cleveland Park neighborhood of Washington. He commutes to Bentonville during the week, to an apartment furnished out of a Wal-Mart store.

Dach's decision to join Wal-Mart has brought him, by his own admission, some mockery, most recently at a seventy-fifth birthday party for his former boss Edward Kennedy. (Dach said that, for each person who teased him, "two others asked

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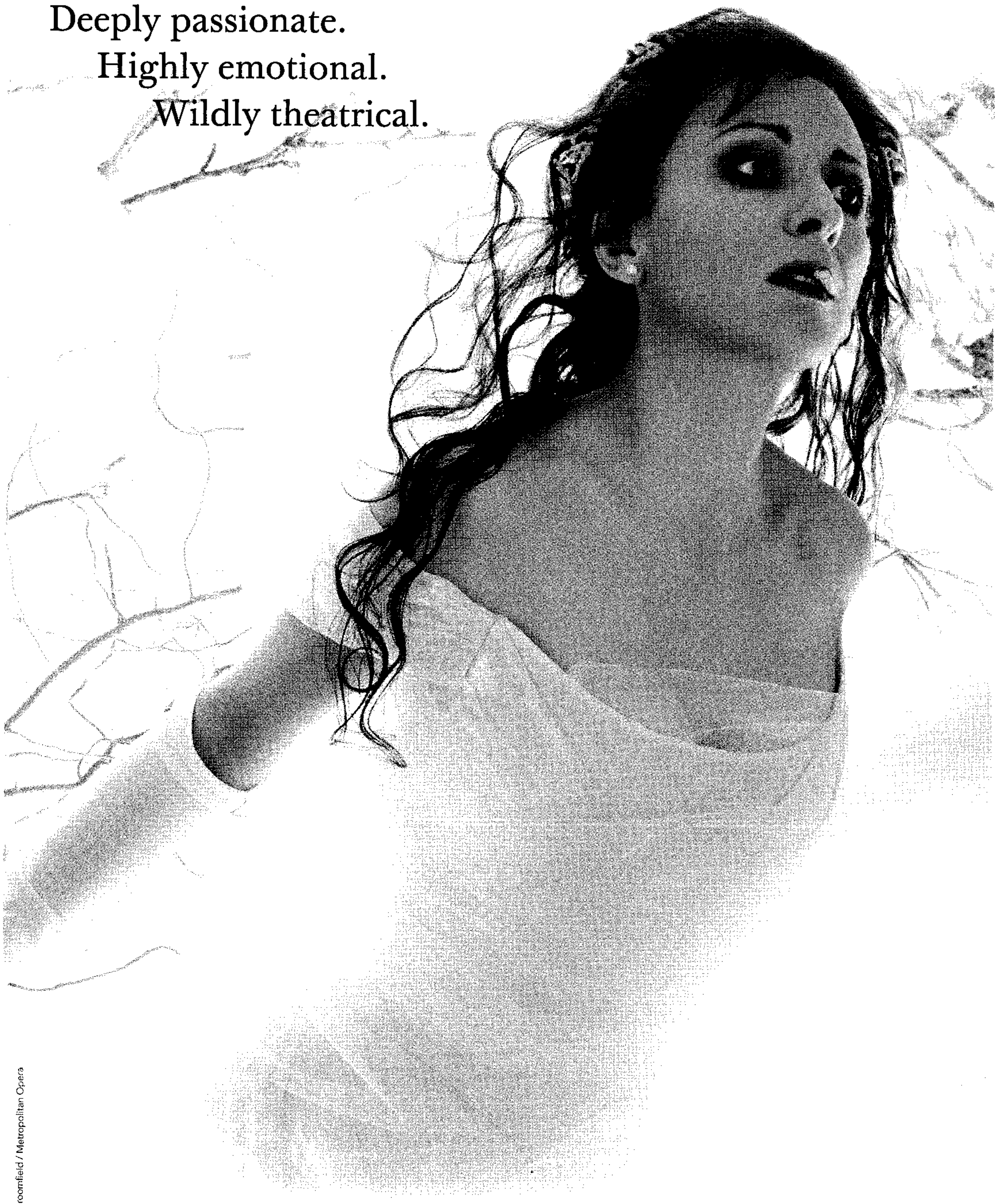

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if they could do business with us.") It has also strained relations with some friends. Joseph Sellers, a prominent civil-rights lawyer who is one of the lead attorneys in the Wal-Mart sex-discrimination lawsuit, said that his relationship with Dach has become awkward. "There's no question that his profession views reality as malleable," Sellers said. "I'm in the reality business."

Even Andy Stern, the president of the service-employees' union, who maintains a diplomatic relationship with Lee Scott, suggested that Dach is a turncoat. Lee Scott, he said, pursues harsh labor policies but is not a hypocrite about it, while Dach, an ostensible progressive, has, by declaring his allegiance to Bentonville, abandoned core principles of Democratic activism. "I would respect him if he said, 'Listen, I'm just trying to get rich,'" Stern told me. "If that was your goal, you did really well. If your goal is to say you're a progressive, then you're full of it."

In a recent conversation, Dach wanted to emphasize that he was not doing this for the money. He added, "I think I've been a person who has cared about issues over my entire professional career, and through seven Presidential campaigns I've tried to make a difference in my own limited way, and I firmly believe Wal-Mart's core proposition of saving people money so they live better, working on sustainability, being part of the solution, moving these policies forward."

Dach knows how to divert an unfriendly question with a flood of words, few of which address the subject at hand. I asked him whether it was moral for a self-styled progressive Democrat to work for a company that, among other things, maintains a mobile squad of union busters who can be dispatched by corporate jet to any store that gives off the faintest rumblings of union activity.

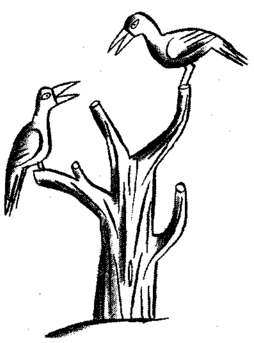
"I think that, first of all, morality is not the right language," he said. "I think the more than one hundred and thirty million people who shop at Wal-Mart each week, who are saving money so they can live a better life, who save money there, they'd be insulted by that frame. Some of these issues are complex, and the debates are complex."

Like the best P.R. men, Dach seems to find joy in spin. One day, while we were having lunch in the Wal-Mart cafeteria, I asked him why all the televisions in the building seemed to be tuned to Fox News. The television in the main lobby was on Fox, as were the televisions in the P.R. wing of the building and in the cafeteria, including one that was ten feet from his head.

"Is that true?" he said. After I assured him that it was, he said, "What about in the mornings? Do you know if they're on Fox in the mornings?"

Such matters, he said, are sideshows. The important thing, he told me, is that Wal-Mart is making changes that even the most loyal Democrat would have to acknowledge are beneficial to the working poor and to the environment. Dach mentioned Wal-Mart's newly instituted plan to provide its customers with generic drugs for four dollars a prescription. The program has been a success, even though, so far, a relatively small number of drugs—about three hundred—are on the four-dollar list. The program is being marketed as a way for Wal-Mart to "give back to the community," as Dach put it. It, too, has its critics. Charlie Sewell, a senior vice-president of the National Community Pharmacists Association, a lobbying group, called the Wal-Mart plan a "classic bait-and-switch," adding that most of the drugs on the list are older, less prescribed drugs.

Wal-Mart's executive vice-president responsible for pharmacies, Bill Simon, told me that the company is making large profits on the program. "It's not like these are twenty-dollar items that we're selling for four dollars as a loss leader," he said. By applying the Wal-Mart model to the generic-drug industry—pressuring manufacturers to sell to Wal-Mart for less—Simon said, the company has been able to make "more money" in pharmaceuticals "than we made last year." Wal-Mart's cost for some generics, he said, is as low as thirty-two cents. Not far from Simon's office is a wall covered with exhortations to the company's workers. One reads, "If you aren't working on sales or the things that enhance the profitability of this company, then you are working on the wrong things."



The generic-drug program has taken some public pressure off the company on the subject of its medical benefits. According to one study, Wal-Mart spends an average of thirty-five hundred dollars per employee per year on health benefits; the average for the retail industry over all is forty-eight hundred dollars. Recently, the company offered employees a "value plan" for health insurance, at a monthly premium as low as eleven dollars in some areas. But a family on the plan would have a three-thousand-dollar deductible, which would make it functionally unaffordable to a worker making seventeen thousand dollars a year. When I asked Linda Dillman, the company's vice-president for benefits, about this potential financial strain, she said, "Well, that's the problem we all have." Dillman was a strong defender of Wal-Mart's benefits plan, and said that the Susan Chambers memo that called for Wal-Mart to cease hiring unhealthy people had been misinterpreted. "The fact that we have to apologize because we want our associates to be healthier is absurd to me," she said.

At the core of Dach's campaign to prove that Wal-Mart is changing is the new "green" campaign—the company's efforts to cut fuel and electricity consumption and make its stores eco-friendly. The green campaign has won some important allies. John Flicker, the president of the National Audubon Society, told me that he is pleased to see Dach at Wal-Mart: "He truly believes in the cause, and at a company the size of Wal-Mart he can truly make a difference." Dach gives credit to Wal-Mart. "All of this began way before I got here," he told me. "The passion for change is widespread throughout the company. I'm just a helper."

As part of the green campaign, Wal-Mart has committed itself to cutting the fuel consumption of its truck fleet, the second-largest in America, and to reducing its electricity bill—Wal-Mart is one of the largest private consumers of electricity in the world—by twenty per cent in the next five years. Dach arranged for me to visit a recently opened Supercenter near Bentonville that was built to conserve energy.

For any number of reasons, this Wal-Mart seemed different from other Wal-Marts I'd been to. The prices were still low, but the workers appeared to be more enthusiastic, and I was impressed, in particular, by the store's environmental innovations. Skylights allowed so much natural illumination that the fluorescent lights were switched off. The lights in the vast freezers were controlled by motion sensors, so they switched on only if someone walked nearby. "In this store alone, we'll save more than a hundred thousand dollars in electricity this year," Charles Zimmerman, a Wal-Mart vice-president who showed me around, said. "What we're trying to do is make sustainability sustainable," Dach said.

Even doubters in the environmental movement acknowledge that Wal-Mart is attempting to lower its energy consumption. "The energy-efficiency piece of this is real," Carl Pope, the executive director of the Sierra Club, told me. "They will deliver on it. But it's a straight-out business call." Pope, who worked with Dach while he was at Audubon—"He was very good at what he did," he said—is now a member of the coalition that makes up Wal-Mart Watch. "The third and by far the most intriguing initiative is that they're going to green their supply chain"—to press their more than sixty thousand suppliers to embrace conservation as well. "They, and perhaps only they, have the market power to do it," Pope said. "It will be phenomenally important if they actually did it."

Pope acknowledged that Wal-Mart's liberalizing environmental strategy will win it new supporters, but he is skeptical of the company's motives. "You can't be a good progressive and support Wal-Mart because Wal-Mart is saving money on energy—that's all they've done so far," he said. On Dach, he was acerbic: "One of the remarkable things about the environmental movement is how rarely people from our side end up on the other side, and Leslie is on the other side."

Environmentalists, he said, should not be swayed by cost savings alone. "You can't say that they have a good business model. Their model is efficient. Henry Ford used efficiency to raise standards, to bring his workers into the middle class. Wal-Mart has that choice. Their game is to say that there's no other way to be efficient. But they've driven down wages across the retail industry, and they don't have to, in order to be profitable." Pope cited Costco, the chief rival to Sam's Club, Wal-Mart's membership warehouse. "Costco pays their workers well"—the average wage at Costco is $17.46 an hour—"and we know they're profitable."

Mona Williams, the chief spokeswoman for Wal-Mart, disagreed. When she was asked why the company could not simply give two-dollar-per-hour across-the-board raises to its store employees, her reply was free of obfuscation. "Wal-Mart's profit per associate is six thousand four hundred dollars," she said. "If we were to pay two dollars more an hour to associates, that would cut four thousand dollars out of our per-employee profit. If anybody ever stopped to do the math, they'd see this. It would take two-thirds of the profit if we gave everyone two dollars more." She added, "You could raise prices, but what about the woman who is shopping for Easter shoes for her kids? We can't raise prices on her."

Dach told me, "Wal-Mart pays competitive wages everywhere we have a store or club. We're one of the only companies to support an increase in the federal minimum wage. We have many more applicants than we have jobs, and we have more than one million people on our health care."

Dach, whose 1988 candidate for President, Michael Dukakis, called for "good jobs at good wages," said that "it's too early to tell" if he will work on the 2008 campaign. (He would not say which candidate he favored, or whether he would remain on the Wal-Mart payroll.) The company, Dach said, is handing out political donations in a more "evenhanded" manner now than it did before his arrival.

"It was very smart of Wal-Mart to appoint him to this job," Kenneth Adelman, the former Reagan Administration arms-control official and one of Dach's former colleagues at Edelman, said. "He's brilliant at what he does. He's a great advocate for Democratic causes." Each election year, Adelman recalled, he and Dach would stage a mock debate before employees in the Edelman office. "It would always start out seriously, and then get funny," he said. "I would argue the Republican line, and Leslie played the part of the Democrat." ♦

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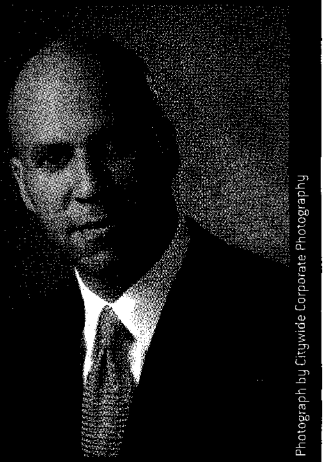

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PASSING

BY DAVID OWEN

Twenty-eight years ago, when I was twenty-four, I did something that adults often fantasize about doing: I went back to high school, and for four months I pretended to be seventeen again. With the help of my literary agent, who posed as my mother, I enrolled at a large public school about an hour and forty minutes outside New York City. I worried at first that one of my teachers or classmates would pick me out as an obvious impostor, but none of them did. Later, I wrote a book about my experience, called "High School." I appeared on "Good Morning America" (where I charmed Joan Lunden by telling her that I felt she could pass for seventeen, too) and on "To Tell the Truth" (where I fooled all the panelists except Kitty Carlisle Hart). And Barry Manilow optioned the movie rights—and the song rights!—to my story.

Well, nothing came of any of that, but my memories of my time-reversing escapade are still so vivid that it's hard for me to believe that nearly thirty years have passed. Recently, I had a brainstorm: Why not try to pull it off again? I'm fifty-two now, but I'm still a kid at heart. Yes, I said to myself, I'll do it: I'll try to pass for forty-five.

The first thing I had to do was make myself look seven years younger. Twenty-eight years ago, I did that by swapping my horn-rim I-need-a-job glasses for a pair of wire-rim aviators and buying a Led Zeppelin T-shirt. This time, I required a more drastic makeover. I went to the men's department at JCPenney and, with a couple of quick glances over my shoulder, picked out a pair of Dockers with a thirty-six-inch waist—the size I used to wear back in my mid-forties, before I gave up and started buying pants that almost actually fit. The Dockers felt pretty darn snug when I pulled them on in the dressing room, but, by inhaling deeply and hopping quickly from one foot to the other, I managed to get them buttoned.

As I carried my new pants to the counter, my heart was pounding. Would the cashier spot my deception—and, perhaps, ask if I wouldn't like for her to gift-wrap the pants so that I could give them to someone seven or so years younger? But no. She rang up my purchase and put the pants in a bag. I had passed! Over the next couple of weeks, I also let my hair grow out about a quarter of an inch.

JULES FEIFFER

In addition to changing my physical appearance, I had to modify my world view. Rather than thinking like someone born in the mid-nineteen-fifties, that is, I had to train myself to think like someone born in the early sixties. "Do you remember where you were when President Kennedy was assassinated?" I asked a middle-aged stranger. "Because I sure don't." At a party a couple of weeks later, I fell into conversation with some people I didn't know, who appeared to be about fifty or fifty-one, or maybe fifty-three or fifty-four. The subject of the nineteen-sixties came up, and, instead of joining them in bragging about all the drugs I used to take, I said, "Boy, did I ever miss out! I was still in elementary school, or possibly early junior high school, when all that cool stuff was goin' down!" Some of the people I said that to looked at me with scorn, and others looked at me with pity, but none of them looked at me with suspicion. They believed me! I had passed! A little later at the same party, I referred to the American invasion of Grenada as "the first television war," and some guy with slightly graying hair jumped all over me. He not only believed that I was in my mid-forties, more or less; he rubbed it in my face.

Little by little, like a Method actor immersing himself in a role, I began to think and act like someone 13.5 per cent younger than I actually am. I started staying up a half hour later on weeknights, until ten-forty-five (after working up to it, five minutes at a time). I asked my wife if she would like to go out to dinner sometime, or something, instead of doing what we usually do on weekends, which is waiting for a new movie that we've read about to come out on DVD and then forgetting to order it from Netflix. I received a somewhat humorous e-mail from someone I vaguely knew and reflexively deleted it, the way I used to, rather than almost deciding to forward it to fifteen or twenty other people under the subject line "GET A LOAD OF THIS!!!!!!" Without even thinking about it, I ordered a bacon cheeseburger for lunch again, instead of just a cheeseburger, and I didn't ask for fruit or salad instead of fries.

All in all, my temporary transformation into a slightly less middle-aged person was probably harder on my wife, who is five years older than I was pretending to be. Or maybe it wasn't. In truth, I never told her what I was doing, mainly because my first experiment in time travel, twenty-eight years ago, had been so difficult for her. At that time, we had been married for just a year, and when I took her as my date to a high-school dance she had a severe reverse-nostalgic experience akin to an LSD flashback or a grand-mal seizure, and for a couple of hours it looked as though we might have to get divorced, even though we weren't finished writing all the thank-you notes for our wedding presents. This time, I decided, I would keep my little adventure to myself, and see if I could fool her, too. And I'm pretty sure I did. At any rate, she's never mentioned it—at least, not in so many words. ◆

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AMERICAN CHRONICLES

OUR TOWN

Four centuries on, the battles over John Smith and Jamestown still rage.

BY JILL LEPORE

Somewhere under the south aisle of St. Sepulchre's Church in London lie the remains of Captain John Smith, who died in 1631, at the age of fifty-one. On a brass plaque, his epitaph reads:

> Here lyes one conquered that hath conquered Kings.
> Subdu'd large Territories, and done things
> Which to the World impossible would seem,
> But that the Truth is held in more esteem.

In other words: believe it or not, he wasn't a liar.

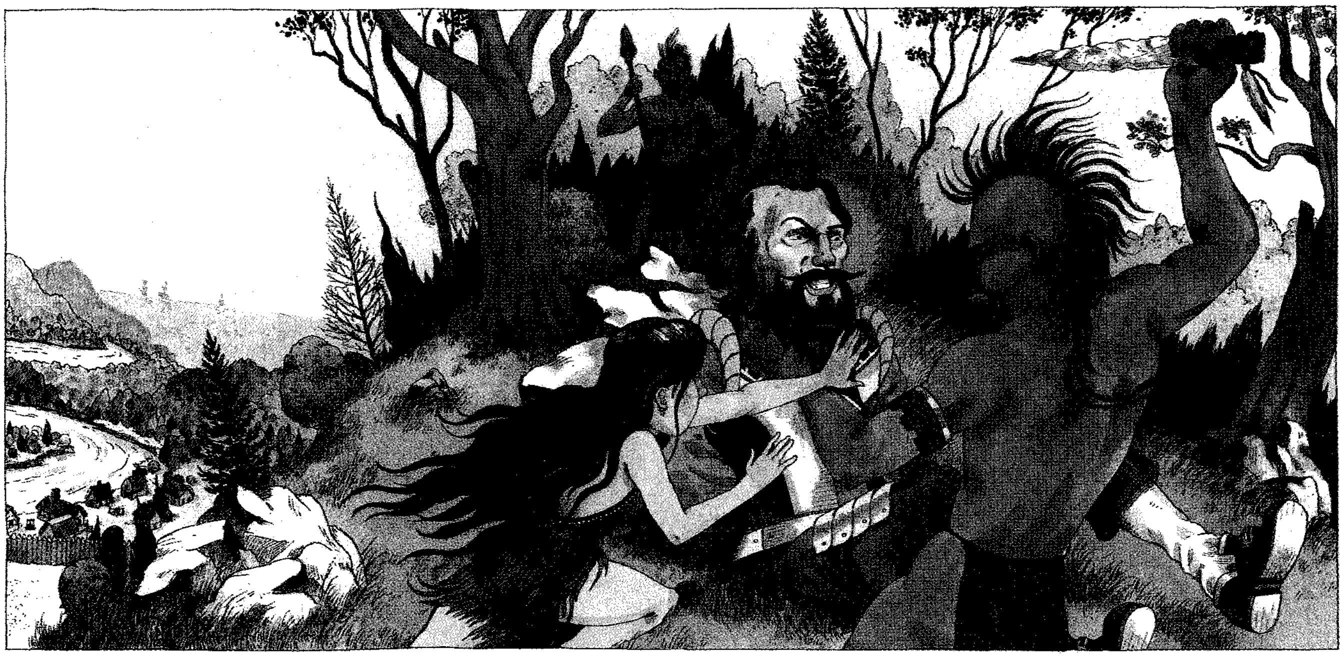
Smith's conquests are, to say the least, hard to credit. In 1630, he published "The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith, in Europe, Asia, Affrica, and America," in which a discerning reader will learn to expect that when the Captain, wearing full armor, has his stallion shot out from under him he'll mount a dead man's horse before his own has hit the ground, and reload his musket while he's at it. Even his mishaps prove his valor. Nobody could have survived so many sea fights, shipwrecks, mutinies, deserted islands, musket wounds, betrayals, captivities, and gashes received while jousting except a man whose coat of arms depicted the severed, turbaned heads of three Turkish champions he defeated in back-to-back duels in Transylvania, and whose motto, emblazoned on his shield, sounds like the title of a James Bond film set in Elizabethan England: *Vincere est vivere.* "To conquer is to live."

In 1631, less than a month before Smith died, a Welsh clergyman named David Lloyd published "The Legend of Captaine Jones," a lampoon of Smith's "True Travels," in which Smith is more Austin Powers than James Bond. A later edition includes, by way of appendix, a spoof of Smith's well-known epitaph:

> Tread softly (mortalls) ore the bones
> Of the worlds wonder Captaine *Jones:*
> Who told his glorious deeds to many,
> But never was believ'd of any:
> Posterity let this suffice,
> He swore all's true, yet here he lyes.

Perhaps it's of more than passing interest that, even before he died, Captain John Smith was widely believed to be a liar, especially since he was also, arguably, the first American historian. In "The True Travels," Smith claimed to have defeated armies, outwitted heathens, escaped pirates, hunted treasure, and wooed princesses—and all this on four continents, no less, if you count a little island in North America that this year celebrates its four-hundredth anniversary as the birthplace of the United States. That would be Jamestown, Virginia, where Smith served as chief chronicler, and where his most disastrous adventures took place.

"America's 400th Anniversary," as Jamestown's quadricentennial has been styled, marks the founding of the first permanent English settlement in North America. It's also a good time to take stock of John Smith, not least because the Library of America has just published a thirteen-hundred-page edition of his works, edited by James Horn, who directs the library at Colonial Williamsburg. Horn has gathered Smith's many writings about Virginia, an adventure recounted not only in "The True Travels" but also, first, in a letter printed without Smith's permission in 1608 as "A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia"; next, in an essay on the Virginia Indians published in 1612 as "A Map of Virginia" and bound with a longer account of the founding of Jamestown, "The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia"; and, again, in "The Generall Historie of Virginia," printed in 1624. Horn's bare-bones edition will never replace Philip L. Barbour's magnificently annotated and definitive three-volume "Complete Works of Captain John Smith," published in 1986, from which Horn has taken the text, but, if it directs new readers to Smith's writings, all the better.



Smith's outlandish accounts of derring-do earned him a reputation as a fabulist. But was there truth in his tall tales?

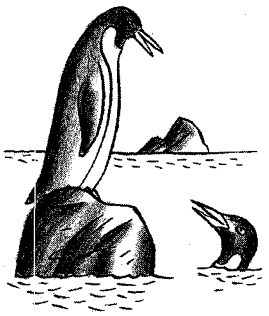
JOHN HENDRIX

"I am no Compiler by hearsay, but have beene a reall Actor," Smith wrote, and true enough. Born in Lincolnshire in 1580, Smith left England at about the age of sixteen, "to learne the life of a souldier." He fought the Spanish in the Netherlands, sailed to Scotland, and returned to England to live like a hermit in the woods, reading books and practicing to be a knight: "His studie was Machiavills Art of warre, and Marcus Aurelius; his exercise a good horse, with his lance and Ring." (Smith often wrote about himself in the third person.) In circa 1599-1600, he crossed the Channel again. After adventures in France, including a sword fight near Mont-Saint-Michel, he tried to sail from Marseilles to Italy but was thrown overboard. Rescued by pirates, he sailed the Mediterranean and learned to fight at sea. In late 1600, he joined Austrian forces to fight the Turks in Slovenia and Hungary, where, for his valor in the field, he was promoted to captain. Wounded in a "dismal battel" in Transylvania, where "30,000 lay, some headlesse, armelesse, and leglesse," Smith and his fellow-survivors were "sold for slaves, like beasts in a market-place." He was sent to Istanbul, to serve his owner's mistress. But she fell in love with him. Eventually, he escaped, and, after making his way through Russia and Poland, and fighting in Morocco, he returned to England in the winter of 1604-05.

In December, 1606, when a burly, bearded Smith was twenty-six, he sailed to Virginia with a fleet of three ships, the Godspeed, the Susan Constant, and the Discovery. For much of the voyage, he was under arrest, accused of plotting a mutiny to "make himselfe king." In May, 1607, Smith and a hundred and four other colonists settled on the banks of a river they called the James, in honor of their king, on land named after his predecessor, Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. On board ship, they had carried a box containing a list of men appointed by the Virginia Company to govern the colony, "not to be opened, nor the governours knowne untill they arived in Virginia." When at last the box was opened, it was revealed that Smith, still a prisoner, was on the list. On June 10, 1607, he was sworn in as a member of the governing council. In September of 1608, he was elected its president—effectively, Virginia's governor. By his telling, he was also its only hope.

Jamestown's reputation, like John Smith's, has had its ups and downs. This anniversary, which comes at a time when the country's need for stories of successful nation-building and military heroes is at a peak, is sure to be a banner year for both the colony and its most famous founder. Elizabeth II will be coming to Jamestown for the festivities in May—concerts, reënactments, exhibits, and more—as she did for the colony's three-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, in 1957. Meanwhile, bookshops are stocking up on confetti-laced birthday books, not only the Library of America edition of Smith's writings, wrapped in its signature red-white-and-blue ribbon, but also a very long list of celebratory tomes, most of which bear subtitles like "Jamestown and the Birth of the American Dream."

That 1607 is being fêted as America's birthday seems, at first, absurd. Really, what's to celebrate? The English were far from being the earliest Europeans to settle on land that would one day become the United States. The Spanish settled at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565; by 1608 they were building Santa Fe. And it's hard to consider Jamestown an auspicious start. Writing in 1975, the great Yale historian Edmund Morgan dubbed it a "fiasco." "Measured by any of the objectives announced for it," Morgan reckoned, "the colony failed." The English landed, and "for the next ten years they seem to have made nearly every possible mistake and some that seem almost impossible." They chose a poor site: on the banks of a brackish river. They had a lousy plan: build a fort, and look for gold. They brought the wrong kind of settlers: idle and indolent English gentlemen, who spent their time bowling in the streets. (Smith counted one carpenter, two blacksmiths, and a flock of footmen, and wrote the rest of the settlers off as "Gentlemen, Tradesmen, Serving-men, libertines, and such like, ten times more fit to spoyle a Common-wealth, then either begin one, or but helpe to maintaine one.") They made enemies easily, especially of the Powhatan Indians, whose hearts and minds they failed to win, even though they relied on them for food, having harvested little of their own. Mostly, they died. Except for the year that Smith was in charge, from the fall of 1608 to the fall of 1609, when he told the colony's half-dead men that he "who would not work must not eat," they starved. It wasn't the land that was the problem. "Had we beene in Paradice it selfe (with those governours), it would not have beene much better," Smith complained.



After October, 1609, when Smith returned to England (ostensibly, to recover from an injury, though, actually, he had more or less been kicked out), Jamestown went to hell. In the winter of 1609-10, five hundred colonists were reduced to sixty. A hair-raising account of those months, written by the president of the council, George Percy, the eighth son of the Earl of Northumberland, paints this scene: "Many throwe extreme hunger have Runne outt of their naked bedds beinge so Leane thatt they Looked lyke anatomes, cryeinge owtt, We are starved. We are starved." In the end, they ate one another. Percy writes, "One of our Colline murdered his wyfe Ripped the Childe outt of her woambe and threwe itt into the River and after Chopped the Mother in pieces and sallted her for his foode." Telling the story of the husband showering his wife with salt, another settler wondered, "Now whether shee was better roasted, boyled or carbonado'd, I know not, but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard of." Happy birthday?

And yet: "The American dream was born on the banks of the James River," the Jamestown archeologist William M. Kelso insists in "Jamestown: The Buried Truth." Kelso writes in a tradition of Jamestown boosters who revel in the colony's eventual success. By the six-teen-twenties, in spite of a mortality rate that was still as high as seventy-five or eighty per cent, the Virginia economy was booming. Hence the American dream: arrive empty-handed, work hard, and get rich. Just as cockeyed, anachronistic, and overblown is a debunking tradition that damns Jamestown as the birthplace of the American nightmare: with corporate funding from wealthy investors (the Virginia Company), steal somebody else's land (the Powhatan's) and reap huge profits by planting and harvesting an addictive drug (tobacco, whose sales were responsible for the boom), while exploiting your labor force (indigent Britons and, after 1619, Africans).

American dream or American nightmare, the bare facts about Jamestown have been dressed up and pressed into the service of either of these narratives. One American abolitionist, writing in 1857—Jamestown's two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary—implied that we ought to ignore 1607 and instead pay attention to the divided nation's twin founding moments: the Pilgrims' 1620 landing in Plymouth and the arrival of the first Africans in Jamestown, in 1619. "Here are the two ideas, Liberty and Slavery—planted at about the same time, in the virgin soil of the new continent; the one in the North, the other in the South. They are deadly foes. Which shall conquer?"

For a very long time, the question that animated the study of Jamestown was the very one that most troubled John Smith: "howe it came to passe there was no better successe." In other words, why did things go so badly? The debate over that question, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties (not coincidentally, in the shadow of Vietnam), was one of the most vigorous in all of early-American historical scholarship, at least as vigorous as the earlier and continuing argument over the causes of the witchcraft outbreak in Salem in 1692 (a debate that has never really crawled out from under the shadow of McCarthyism). The too-many-gentlemen theory is compelling—in Smith's shorthand, "miserable is that Land, where more are idle then well imployed"—but for years historians marshalled evidence in support of a range of provocative explanations, from malaria and typhoid to salt poisoning and the Little Ice Age, and, finally, to the colonists' stubborn preference for planting tobacco to sell instead of corn to eat.

This year's birthday books have turned that unanswered question upside down, asking not why Jamestown at first failed but why, in the end, it succeeded. Thus does the Jamestown quadricentennial snatch victory from the jaws of a man who ate his wife.

"To call Jamestown a failure, let alone a disaster, is to oversimplify," Kelso writes. Kelso's evidence for this claim is what he has found: Jamestown Fort. Before Kelso came along, most archeologists had concluded that the remains of the fort that the settlers built in the spring of 1607 had long since been washed away by the James River. Kelso was sure that its foundation lay underground, and not underwater. Beginning in 1993, when he was hired as the director of archeology for the Jamestown Rediscovery Project, Kelso oversaw the painstaking discovery of the fort's footprint, one of the most exciting finds ever in American historical archeology. Within and around the fort's footprint, Kelso's team dug up not only human remains, palisade lines, and building foundations but also more than seven hundred thousand artifacts: beads, armor, pottery, and tools, each with a story to tell. They found the jawbone of a dog, with lead shot in it; a butchered turtle; thimbles; a suit of armor, thrown down a well, piece by piece; even a fancy silver "ear picker." What story these artifacts tell is less clear. (Wouldn't it have been better to pack a few more hoes for the voyage, and not so many ear pickers?) Kelso's extraordinary findings are sure to inspire a new generation of tourists, and scholars from around the world, to visit and revisit Jamestown. For now, he proposes that the archeological record tilts toward proving that Jamestown's first settlers weren't nearly as hapless as John Smith made them out to be, not least because they built a very good fort very quickly. He offers this measured assessment: "There is evidence that some of the immigrants worked hard."

Karen Kupperman, in her new study, "The Jamestown Project," agrees. Like Kelso, Kupperman, a historian at New York University who has written about early American colonization for two and a half decades, attributes Jamestown's eventual success not to unrelenting investors or slave labor or the price of tobacco but to the hard work of "ordinary colonists." "The truly remarkable thing about Jamestown is that it somehow survived," Kupperman argues.

What's most useful about Kupperman's work is the careful attention she pays to many of the Jamestown colonists' earlier experience with Islam. John Smith had three Turks' heads on his shield and, as a slave to Muslims, he had eaten "Cuskus" (he went to fight the Turks because he regretted having "seene so many Christians slaughter one another"), but he wasn't the only Jamestown adventurer to have travelled through the Ottoman Empire. William Strachey, who became secretary of the colony in 1609, had been in Istanbul two years earlier. George Sandys, the colony's treasurer, had travelled, by camel, to Jerusalem and had written, at length, about the "Mahometan Religion." To these Englishmen, the New World beckoned as but another battlefield for the Old World's religious wars; one of the chief reasons to hunt for gold in America was to use the money to defeat Muslims in Europe.

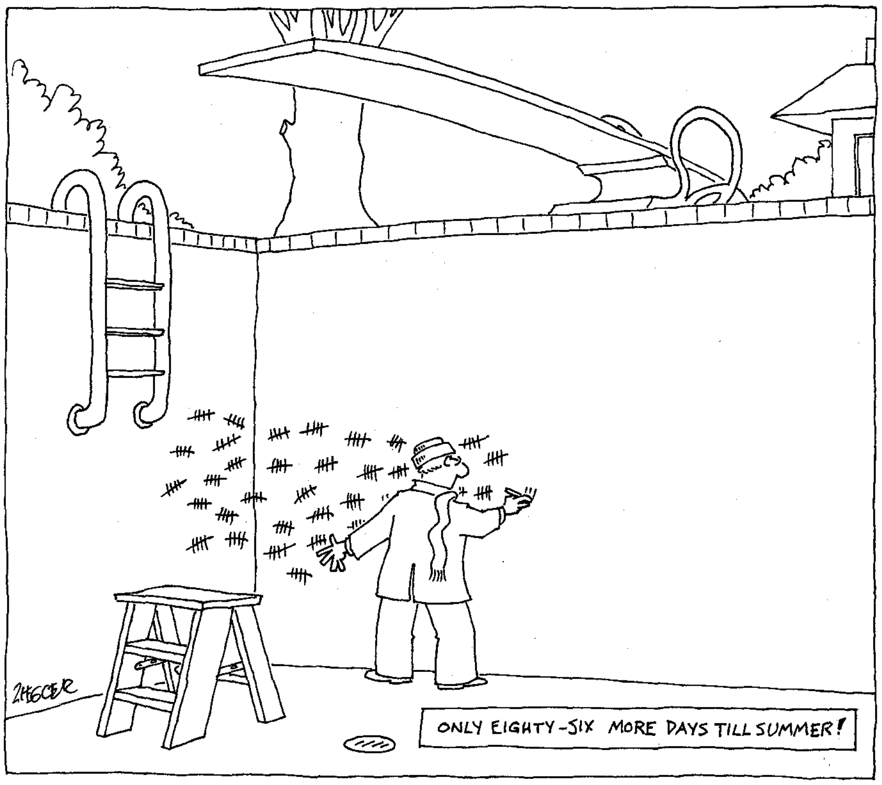
While providing this extraordinarily helpful context for what happened in Jamestown, Kupperman mainly measures the colony against both previous and later English settlement efforts in the Chesapeake Bay, the Caribbean, and New England, including Roanoke, England's first attempt to establish a foothold in the New World, on the outer shoals of what is now North Carolina. That settlement was the subject of an earlier, excellent study by Kupperman. Founded in 1584, Roanoke was deserted three years later, and it's anyone's guess what happened to the more than a hundred men, women, and children who were left behind when the governor, John White, sailed to England for help; when he returned, in 1590, they were gone. Compared with Roanoke, Kupperman points out, Jamestown is a stunner.

Kupperman's argument, that Jamestown wasn't really that bad, requires her to explain why it *looks* so bad. Resolutely, she blames the sources, "which consist largely of complaints, special pleading, and excuses sent by colonists back to their patrons in England." They made everything sound worse than it was. The devil of it is that some of these kvetchers were actually colorful writers, and this, Kupperman warns ominously, has led historians to make a fatal error: reading their accounts "to mine them for pithy quotes." Again with the wife-eating man!

John Smith liked to blame whiners, too. "Ingenious verbalists," he called those who came to Virginia, while he was in charge, only to find themselves shocked by what they saw, "because they found not English Cities, nor such faire houses, nor at their owne wishes any of their accustomed dainties, with feather beds and downe pillowes." Such men, he said, were those who would call Virginia, under his inspired leadership, "a misery, a ruine, a death, a hell." But after Smith returned to England he began to see that what was going on in Jamestown was impossible to discover from so far away, investors having need of twisting the story this way and that, like so many Enron executives, in a world without a Securities and Exchange Commission (although by 1624 a royal commission had begun investigating the Virginia Company for mismanagement). No matter how many men ate their wives, Smith wearily concluded, reports in England would make "the Company here thinke all the world was Oatmeale there."

The question of whether John Smith was a liar is inseparable from the question of whether Jamestown was a failure. They don't map onto each other exactly, but it usually works like this: if Smith told the truth, Jamestown was a disaster, except when he was in charge. It's possible to both believe Smith and see Jamestown as a success, but let's just say that this requires quite a bit of squinting. Generally, if, like the Virginia Company, you'd like to think that everything in Jamestown was oatmeal, it helps if you are willing to say that Smith was either ill-informed or stretching the truth, although, most often, those who discredit him aren't as gracious as that. Their assessments have more of a liar-liar-pantaloons-on-fire quality. (As it happens, and just for the record, they were: the injury that sent Smith back to England was a severe burn that he sustained to his thighs and groin when, it seems, his gunpowder bag, lying in his lap, caught the spark of a tobacco pipe and exploded.)

"He swore all's true, yet here he lyes." As David Lloyd's "The Legend of Captaine Jones" would have it, Smith made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ONLY EIGHTY-SIX MORE DAYS TILL SUMMER!

up most of what he wrote, or at least exaggerated, brazenly. Nevertheless, in the colonies, and especially in the early United States, "The Legend of Captaine Jones" was entirely forgotten and, despite lingering doubts about his credibility, Smith became a romantic hero of the nineteenth-century American South. His exploits were celebrated—and lavishly embroidered—in songs and in antebellum stage productions that implausibly but invariably paired him, romantically, with Pocahontas, the daughter of the Powhatan's most powerful leader, who, no older than fourteen when Smith left Virginia, in 1609, actually married a colonist named John Rolfe, in 1614.

This distortion of historical fact was more than Henry Adams could abide. Appalled by the growing myth of Smith's romance with Pocahontas, Adams earned his reputation as a historian by savaging the Captain's. In an 1867 essay in the *North American Review*, Adams's first piece of historical criticism (in 1870, he would be named professor of history at Harvard), he pointed out that Smith's account of his rescue by Pocahontas changed every time he told it. Worse, Smith didn't even mention the rescue before Pocahontas's visit to London, in 1616, when she was received as a foreign dignitary. Only afterward did Smith boast that Pocahontas had once "hazarded the beating out of her owne braines to save mine," after her father, Powhatan, had ordered his men to kill him. In his 1624 "Generall Historie," Smith added still more detail: "Being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines, Pocahontas the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death." Lies, lies, and more lies! cried Adams. Smith's work, he concluded, contained "falsehoods of an effrontery seldom equaled in modern times."

In offering this exposé, Adams claimed to have been motivated solely by his zeal to establish the "bald historical truth," but privately he confessed that he considered his essay "a rear attack on the Virginia aristocracy." Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Adams, who despised the South, delighted in defeating a founding father of the Old Dominion. John Gorham Palfrey, a Harvard professor and New England booster who had persuaded Adams to write the essay in the first place, was equally pleased, allegedly telling him that "a stone thrown at Smith would be as likely to break as much glass as a missile heaved in any other direction." He was right. Smith's already fragile reputation as a man of his word and, especially, as a historian was shattered (and Palfrey's project, to promote New England as the birthplace of America, and 1620 as its birthday, greatly advanced). Smith had his defenders, to be sure, including Edward Arber, who edited an eleven-hundred-page compilation of his writings, in 1884, and who argued that "wherever we *can* check Smith, we find him both modest and accurate." But far more common was the kind of dismissal offered by J. Franklin Jameson, in his 1891 "History of Historical Writing in America," in which he concluded, after reading Smith, that "what was historical was not his and what was his was not historical." In effect, Adams and Jameson relegated Smith's works to the (lowly) rank of literature, and demoted Smith himself from historian to mere writer. After that, about the nicest thing that any American historian was willing to say about John Smith was an aside offered in 1930 by Samuel Eliot Morison, who called him "a liar, if you will; but a thoroughly cheerful and generally harmless liar."

IN A LITTLE APARTMENT

I ask my father, "What do you do all day?" "I remember."

So in that dusty little apartment in Gliwice,
in a low block in the Soviet style
that says all towns should look like barracks,
and cramped rooms will defeat conspiracies,
where an old-fashioned wall clock marches on, unwearied,

he relives daily the mild September of '39, its whistling bombs,
and the Jesuit garden in Lvov, gleaming
with the green glow of maples and ash trees and small birds,
kayaks on the Dniester, the scent of wicker and wet sand,
that hot day when you met a girl who studied law,

the trip by freight car to the west, the final border,
two hundred roses from the students
grateful for your help in '68,
and other episodes I'll never know,
the kiss of a girl who didn't become my mother,

the fear and sweet gooseberries of childhood, images drawn
from that calm abyss before I was.
Your memory works in the quiet apartment—in silence,
systematically, you struggle to retrieve for an instant
your painful century.

—*Adam Zagajewski*

(*Translated, from the Polish, by Clare Cavanagh.*)

Since then, three things have happened: it has been discovered that much of what Smith wrote was actually true; historians have begun to care more about the art of lying (a.k.a. literature), anyway; and Smith has been rehabilitated as an astute, if biased, ethnographer.

In 1953, the historian Bradford Smith published a biography that aimed to check John Smith's word against that of his contemporaries, and, working both with newly discovered sources in England and, more important, with a Hungarian scholar named Laura Polanyi Striker, B. Smith concluded that J. Smith was a man of his word. A quixotic, self-aggrandizing Elizabethan gallant and knight-errant? Yes. But a fraud? No. Inspired by Bradford Smith's biography, Philip Barbour, a linguist and former intelligence officer, scoured archives across Eastern Europe, where he was able to corroborate an astonishing number of details in Smith's "True Travels." All manner of additional research—including a successful re-creation, by the Boy Scouts of Graz, Austria, of a mountaintop torch-message system that Smith had described but which had never before been tested—further supported the Captain's credibility.

Meanwhile, scholars came to agree that "Smith was as much a man of letters as a man of action," as John Wood Sweet has put it. Historians now commonly read Smith as a writer engaged in what the literary critic Stephen Greenblatt labelled "self-fashioning."

Finally, students of Jamestown with a more anthropological cast of mind, and with an interest in the Powhatan, have claimed Smith as one of early America's best ethnographers. After all, compared with his contemporaries Smith was a keen observer, although it's worth remembering that most of what he saw, in Transylvania as much as in Jamestown, was altogether new to him, stranger than strange, and he wasn't always able to make sense of it. Two historians, James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, once tried to imagine how Smith might have reported a July afternoon spent at Yankee Stadium:

> Being assembled about a great field of open grass, a score of their greatest men ran out upon the field, adorned each in brightly hued jackets and breeches, with letters cunningly woven upon their Chestes, and wearinge caps . . . upon their heades, of a sort I know not what. One of their chiefs stood in the midst and would at his pleasure hurl a white ball at another chief, whose attire was of a different colour, and whether by chance or artifyce I know not the ball flew exceeding close to the man yet never injured him, but sometimes he would strike att it with a wooden club and so giveing it a hard blow would throw down his club and run away.

In other words, you can count on Smith for abundant detail, and admirable accuracy, but he's fairly likely to leave out what you most want to know: "Yankees 10, Red Sox 3."

At the age of twenty-nine, John Smith returned to England. He spent most of the rest of his life, another twenty-two years, writing. He never took up another profession. He never married, or had children (facts perhaps best explained by his pantaloons having been set on fire; his wound has a decided Toby Shandy quality to it). He was restless. He wanted, urgently, to participate in more northern settlements—he gave New England its name—but the Puritans didn't want him along. Instead, he had to be content with giving them armchair advice, a role he despised: "It were more proper for mee, To be doing what I say, then writing what I knowe." His last work, published in the year of his death, is an impassioned essay with a desperate title: "Advertisements for the unexperienced Planters of New-England, or any where." Smith's advice—bring your women (but don't eat them) and don't forget to plant corn—was taken, and may well have saved New England from Jamestown's early misery, but Smith himself died poor and scorned. As Adams put it, in the very language so often used to describe early Virginia, Smith's career "turned out a failure, and his ventures ended disastrously."

And Jamestown? Was it, too, a failure and a disaster? Or was it, instead, the birthplace of the American dream? Maybe this question has outlived its usefulness. By considering the world that Jamestown made, and ignoring the world that made Jamestown, it hides more than it reveals. John Smith was more medieval than modern, closer to a Crusader than to a Founding Father. Neither he nor Jamestown can bear the burden of our national need for a tidy past. (Neither can Plymouth, for that matter.) What happened in Jamestown is a story of vaunting ambition and staggering success in the face of surpassing cruelty and rank catastrophe. It is a story of some lessons painfully learned, and others not learned at all. The world isn't made of oatmeal. And maybe to conquer isn't the only way to live. ♦

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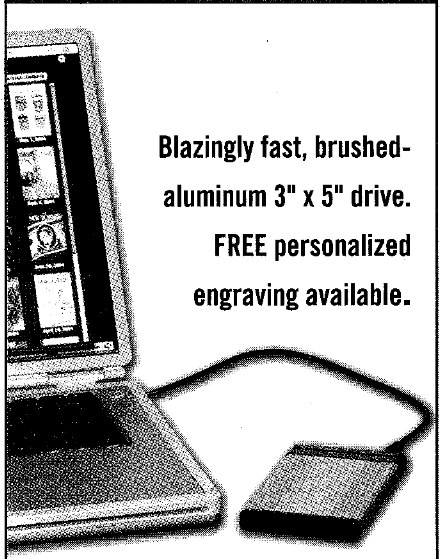

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NOTES OF A GASTRONOME

THE TAMING OF THE CHEF

Can Gordon Ramsay make it here?

BY BILL BUFORD

Gordon Ramsay, the only chef in London honored with three stars by the *Guide Michelin*, is not a monster. Ramsay, who is also the host of three uniquely adversarial in-your-face television shows ("Hell's Kitchen" in the United States; "The F Word" and "Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares" in the United Kingdom), is not the most abusive person running a restaurant. And although a British undercover documentary once captured him in mid-torrent, profanities flowing in a diatribe directed at a young intern, earning Ramsay the title of one of the country's "most unbearable bosses," the people who work for him show a tenacious, irrational-seeming loyalty verging on love. But he does get angry, helplessly and uncontrollably angry—not an earthly anger but something darker—and has trouble knowing how to stop.

I'd been with Ramsay in his new restaurant in New York since he arrived, on November 14th. The weekend before, he had been celebrating his fortieth birthday, in the Banqueting House at Whitehall ("Where the Queen had her eightieth"): two hundred and eighty guests, standup comics, a rock-and-roll stripper, a performance by the cast of "Chicago," a midnight disco, magnums of wine from the birth year, fifty chefs, plus "a very English sweetshop" and "a good British breakfast" at midnight. That afternoon, he received copies of the American edition of his autobiography, his second book that year, and embarked on the making of a documentary for Britain's Channel 4. The shooting began at New Jersey's Teterboro Airport, the film crew meeting Ramsay's plane (a Gulfstream that he was hoping to fly between England and New York every week), and continued at the midtown Manhattan hotel where the new restaurant was housed, formerly the Rihga Royal, now renamed the London. (The documentary's ending, the director told me, would be the publication, next fall, of the new *Guide Michelin*, the film informed by "Gordon's quest for another three stars.") That evening, hundreds were expected for an opening party, and the hotel was full of workmen finishing the refurbishments—a coat-check room, a fake fireplace—the lobby crowded with photographers, architects, executives from Gordon Ramsay Holdings, a soundman with a long mike crashing into many of them, determined to remain in range of his subject.

"I do television so I can do New York," Ramsay explained. He was alluding to "Hell's Kitchen," the cook-off reality show produced by Fox that introduced Ramsay to an American audience two years ago, but he could have been describing an over-all strategy. "Basically, I'm a prostitute. I prostitute myself so I can have a restaurant here. But I don't fully take off my knickers."

The restaurant included a fine-dining room with only twelve tables, a bar area that could accommodate seventy for dinner, and three flamboyantly large banquet rooms. If everything went well, the start-up would cost eight million dollars, which was being met entirely by Ramsay, in cash. He was clearly experienced at this sort of thing—the restaurant, his twelfth, would be called Gordon Ramsay at the London, and it would be the fourth business Ramsay had named after himself, joining a Ramsay in Tokyo and two Ramsays in London. But this was his first restaurant in America. It was also a first for Americans: an English cook had come to this country to serve, in effect, English food, for two centuries the most mocked cuisine in the world.

I followed Ramsay into the kitchen, normally the domain of the head chef, Neil Ferguson, a Ramsay lieutenant for ten years, but Ramsay's place when he was in it, often rushing through in a sprint-walk, as he was now, disturbing everyone, cooking a dish himself, cutting up a piece of meat, tasting a sauce ("Whoa! We're not going with that tonight—a bottle of water for every section, *now!* You're all dehydrated, your palates are fucked"), wilting an endive ("No, this is how you do it—you start with a really hot pan, right?"). Ramsay is six feet two, light on his feet, once a teen-age recruit for the Glasgow Rangers, the legendary Protestant soccer club of his birthplace (though he grew up in England), bionic to the touch (especially his calves, which he invited me to feel and described as "loaves of foie gras"—inaccurately, since foie gras is squishy whereas these mutant monstrosities were like oversized bowling pins). He has a military bearing, erect but tilted slightly forward, and wears a tight-fitting chef's jacket made in France of a lightweight cotton, his own design, snug at the chest, tapered around the waist, with unconventionally high short sleeves. The look says speed.

That afternoon, Ramsay tasted the restaurant's dishes and changed most of them. He revised more the next day. He was still revising as the first lunch service began, eliminating items already printed on the menu: an oxtail that was too fancy ("It's too arty—I just can't identify what I'm eating"), an eggplant that was too tough ("Will someone give me a pneumatic drill so I can get through the fucker?"), a phallic pigeon leg ("No woman is going to put that bone in her mouth—that's disgusting"). He spotted a waiter without a waistcoat. He stopped another with a tie broadly knotted around his collar.

"Young man, what's your name?"

"Swapon, chef."

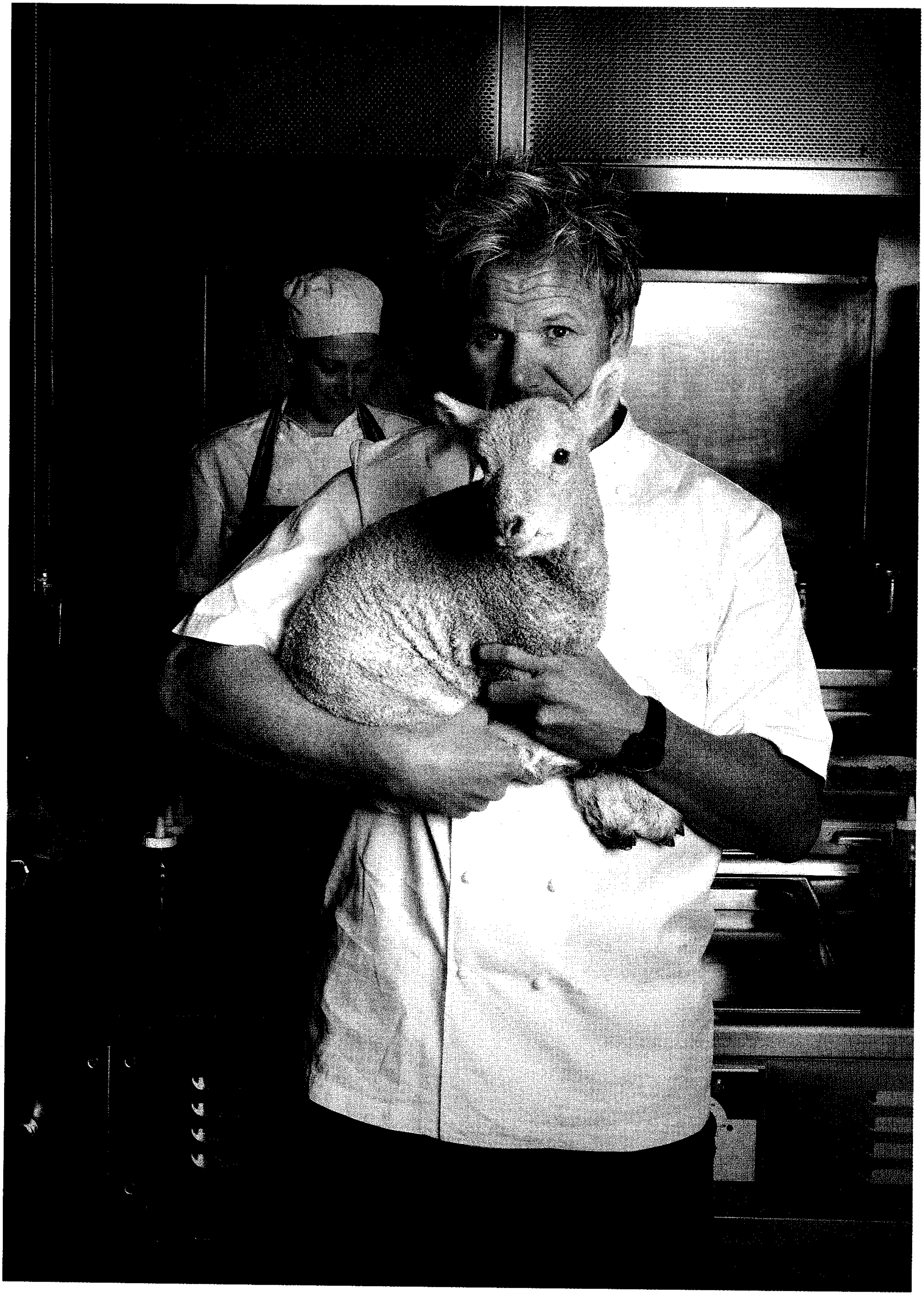
"Your knot," Ramsay said. "It's very big, don't you think?"

"Yes, chef."

"You know what they say in Britain—the bigger the knot, the smaller the cock. Young man, I'm sure your cock is very big. Will you do something about your knot, please?"

"Yes, chef."

Ramsay examined a rabbit leg on the



Ramsay, a Brit, had come to this country to serve the most mocked cuisine in the world. Photograph by Jillian Edelstein.

pass, the shelf where a completed dish is set before it is picked up and taken into the dining room. The leg had been sliced in three, and some stuffing had spilled out. Ramsay stared at the stuffing. An established item in the repertoire had been diminished by a bit of last-minute sloppiness, and the sight enraged him.

The culprit was Stuart Collins, twenty-three, adolescently thin, long-limbed, with big ears and the quick-twitch temperament of a racing animal. (Most members of the fine-dining kitchen—the bar was served by a different operation—made me think of overbred greyhounds, not a woman among them, all of them skilled and clearly capable of instantaneous nervous collapse.) Stuart was one of twenty-seven cooks and waiters who had worked for Ramsay in Britain and who—after visas were secured and midtown apartments found—had been moved to New York. He knew what he was in for.

In Ramsay's eyes, the problem was a lack of spontaneity—a difficult condition to fix with an imperative. "You are cooking like a robot," he said. "How could you think that was O.K.? Use your head." Then, seeing Stuart start to fluster, Ramsay added, "You have nothing to worry about," which should have been reassuring, except that Ramsay then seemed to recall the disgraced rabbit leg and was affronted by it all over again—"So stop acting like a fucking dick or else I will ship you back to London, eh? How would you feel if you found yourself at Heathrow in the morning?"—and Stuart stiffened visibly, which seemed to inflame Ramsay yet again. "You are making me very nervous, young man," he said. "Did you hear me? You are making me very fucking nervous." He stared at Stuart and, on not getting a reply, screamed, "Will you just fucking relax!" Stuart's ears turned deep red.

Once Ramsay allowed himself to get angry, he seemed to look around for other things to stay angry about, as though something had been switched on that he couldn't control. For Stuart, the next item involved a pigeon. He was cooking the breast in a sauté pan. Ramsay walked over and stood inches away.

"More oil in your pan! You're not cooking it. You're scorching it. Did you hear me? You're ruining the dish."

"Yes, chef." Stuart quickly added oil to his pan.

"Why are you scorching it?"

"I don't know, chef."

"You don't know! Will you get a grip?"

"Yes, chef."

"Will you focus?"

"Yes, chef."

Ramsay stared, bewildered. In his kitchen, meat was browned with butter and oil, the pan tilted every now and then, and the fat spooned on top. Stuart, under scrutiny, was shovelling the fat at an astonishing speed, spoon after spoon, like a cartoon on fast-forward—anything to keep him from having to look up. Ramsay wasn't moving.

"Your sauce has too much chicken stock."

"Yes, chef."

"It's going to taste like shit."

"Yes, chef." Stuart poured out some stock.

Ramsay continued to stare. "You are so fucking formatted. Neil is not going to notice if you give him a rabbit that's been sliced twice instead of three times." As head chef, Neil approved all dishes at the pass. "It's like you're wearing a straitjacket. Will you fucking loosen up?"

Stuart seemed unable to loosen up while being screamed at.

"Young man, I asked you a question," Ramsay said.

"Yes, chef."

"When are you going to get into the zone? You're a three-star chef. You should go right into the zone. I can't wait for you. You might as well be home, watching Oprah on TV or looking at Rachael Ray's tits." And like that: once the suggestion was made, an invitation was extended, and Stuart was told to brush up on his thirty-minute meals.

Were displays of this kind for my benefit? They occurred so often that I didn't see how they could be. The next day, the sommelier, Gregory Condes, made the mistake of approaching the pass during service—he had a question for Neil about oranges and had got momentarily in the way—and was so humiliated that, by the end of a long and relentless haranguing, his face puffed up with held-back tears. Minutes later, a line cook, James Kent, committed a variation of the same offense. James was then tortured, until finally he, too, was ordered out. "Go, leave, now. The sight of you disgusts me," Ramsay said. But then he paused and became reflective, seeming to savor the effects of his punishment. "Did you see that young chef's face?" Ramsay

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"I don't mind car chases as long as they're car chases about something."

"Cut the opera, Fred, and go to sleep!"

asked. "The way it was all knotted up? Wasn't that fantastic? He was in terrible pain. Isn't it fascinating how food can make for such pure emotion? He was desperate. He wants to be here so badly it hurts. We'll have to pull him back up." He called over Dale MacKay, the sous-chef. "Treat that young man like your little brother. Take him under your wing. Build his confidence."

One day, a woman shouted from the chef's table, situated just in front of the pass, "Gordon, tell your cooks to fuck off, and I'll leave a thousand-dollar tip!" Ramsay explained that he couldn't talk to people that way when they were being good. But, by the end of the evening, there it was—a giant gratuity. "Oh, how funny. I must have lost it and not realized it. At least the waiters were happy."

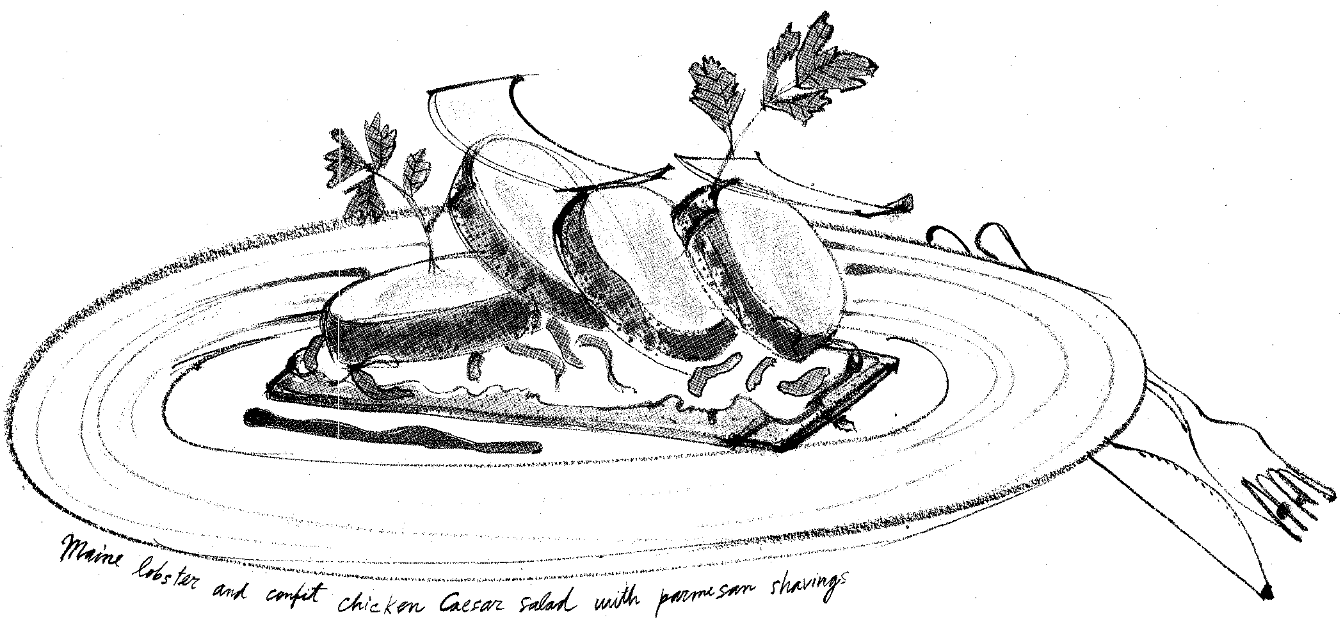
Ramsay has a large head, ruffled unkempt blond hair (pointing now in all directions, his hands continuously running through it), a face of deep lines, like childhood scars. You don't see lines like these on a man who has just turned forty. Ramsay doesn't smoke, and is a marathon runner. The lines betray something that exercise can't melt: Stress? Fear?

"I'm under so much pressure," Ramsay said, on his second visit to New York, shortly after Thanksgiving, his face a road map of punishment. "Massive pressure. Just massive."

Gordon Ramsay grew up in a tourist town, Stratford-Upon-Avon, but in a part tourists don't visit, a council estate, a concrete bunker subsidized by the local government, synonymous with deprivation and blight. Food mattered, not as culture ("I did not pod beans at my grandmother's knee, gather forest mushrooms nor chase farmyard hens") but in a way that was elemental and pressing: as "tea," as something to eat, cheap food, fried food, food in packets, food in tins, or "if Dad had done a runner, no food at all." (Dad, a boozing philandering pub-band musician always on the lookout for the main chance and always coming up short, was also Gordon Ramsay, and, owing to the shared name, the son still gets letters from creditors, ten years after his father's death.) But food ultimately provided Ramsay with his first employment: a part-time job, a catering-school scholarship, a pub kitchen, a hotel restaurant in London, until 1988, when, flipping through a magazine, he came upon a picture of Marco Pierre White. White, then the temperamental, highly public chef of Harvey's—a small restaurant in southwest London—had the unusual ability to look like his reputation: spent, disgusted (with himself, the world, you), a B-movie actor's cigarette dangling from his mouth, strands of greasy hair in his eyes, no chef's hat, no customer service, no interest in business, no smile. Pictures of White said: Cooking is more important than life. Ramsay saw one, and it changed everything. "There's Jesus."

Ramsay, a line cook from the provinces, somehow persuaded the hottest chef in the country (and, at twenty-seven, the youngest with two Michelin stars) to take him on, starting as a lowly vegetable-chopping *commis*, and emerged two years later transformed, capable of running White's kitchen single-handedly, the plan for the rest of his life scripted. What happened? Ramsay is vague, except to credit White with "everything" ("Lightness, delicacy, finesse, balance—I wouldn't be where I am now if it weren't for Marco"), and, if pressed, mentions only the excesses: the hours, the abuse, the weeping, spending the night on a dining-room banquette because there wasn't time to go home and be back for the morning prep. A photograph of Ramsay's tenure at Harvey's, taken in 1989, is included in White's first book. According to Ramsay, an enraged customer had burst into the kitchen and attacked White, and after Ramsay and another cook had pulled the customer off and thrown him out they gleefully turned on each other.

History might well record that this moment, or some time near it, was a turning point in British food. Until then, it was one of two kinds: high church or low. The low is legendary and perplexing: how, for two centuries, has a country with so many resources—creams and butters and handmade cheeses, a practice of grass-feeding sheep and cattle, wild fish, abundant game—produced such a spectacularly loathsome fare? "Try harder than ever for quality," Elizabeth David wrote in the 1977 edition of "French Provincial Cooking." "A little fine olive oil, or true, clear stock, or double cream from Jersey herds, or a few fresh eggs laid by decently-fed, humanely-reared hens." The simple good ingredients were there: why weren't people using them? Why did they seek out the substandard, the industrial, and the unhealthy: prawn cocktail crisps, say, or fish fingers with Birds Eye peas (a "traditional" Sunday supper), or a "spag bol," that horrific canned imitation of a classic Bolognese pasta? The implicit complaint—that the English don't care what they put in their mouths—was evident in how it got there: by scooping up most of what was on your plate and eating it in one bite. Using your knife, you *crushed* what you could onto the back of your fork, one item after the other, your starches (like that perennial favorite chips *and* mash), your green-gray veg, a modest protein, calculatedly overcooked, unless it was fish, in which case it was just outright obliterated, and then—*bang!*—into the mouth, fork upside down. “I really don’t know what English food is,” Ramsay told me. “Spotted dick? Toad-in-the-hole? Curry is the national dish, and people still fry Mars bars for dinner.”



Maine lobster and confit chicken Caesar salad with parmesan shavings

FILIPE JARDIM

But high church was also compromised, because it was usually cooked by a Frenchman. The practice, which effectively started with the Norman Conquest, was firmly established by 1789—after the Revolution, a whole generation of kitchen help left France and found work in upper-class English homes—and was well consolidated by the nineteenth century, when, in 1816, Antonin Carême, the greatest chef of his generation, moved to London to cook for the Prince Regent. In England, good food has always been French, even if, today, many suspect it can’t possibly be the real thing (if the chef is so great, what’s he doing here?), a suspicion held also by Ramsay. “When I heard that Maison Blanc had gone tits up, it added two inches to my cock,” Ramsay was quoted as saying after Raymond Blanc’s restaurant, Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons, in Oxfordshire, yet again did not get a third Michelin star, adding, “I don’t give a fuck what that jumped-up little French twat thinks—the only reason he’s in Britain is because he failed in France.” And yet Anglicized French chefs, even if despised, have always been the teachers of ambitious English cooks. Marco Pierre White worked for several of them, all British residents, all but one foreign-born, including Blanc. But Ramsay started with a British one, with White.

For Ramsay, White was boss, teacher, father figure, rival. He fed Ramsay hundreds of foods for the first time—truffles, morels, reduced sauces, a perfectly cooked scallop—and introduced him to a comparably long list of combinations: red mullet with citrus, say, or shellfish with ginger. White had taken a lad from a council estate (White, too, had grown up in one, in Leeds) and introduced him to a different world. But then Ramsay seemed unable to let go. After three years at Harvey’s, he went to work for the Roux brothers, White’s first London employers. After two years, he went to Pierre Koffman, on the Royal Hospital Road. “Were you imitating Marco?” I asked. “Absolutely,” he said. “But then I went to France, which Marco never did.” When Ramsay returned to London, in 1993, wanting his own enterprise, he called on White again, who introduced him to “the Italians,” three bankers with a new restaurant company, A to Z Restaurants Ltd., who had bought a small, failing business off the Kings Road in Chelsea and were looking for a chef. White proposed Ramsay, and Ramsay signed on, and was rewarded with twenty-five per cent of the equity.

Aubergine opened in October, a French menu with an easy, unforced Englishness: a fish poached in red wine, a consommé flavored with Earl Grey tea, a tart made with a base of crushed digestive biscuits. If White was in evidence, it was White simplified: instead of the elaborate “blanquettes of scallops and langoustines with cucumber and ginger,” Ramsay roasted his shellfish (they were golden, like potatoes) and served them with a ginger cream. There were plenty of truffles and caviar and lobster and foie gras, if only because Ramsay, having discovered the earth’s most precious ingredients, now couldn’t run a kitchen without them. The result was a modest cultural breakthrough, as though finally everyone had come to realize the same thing at the same time: after centuries of French cooking in England, couldn’t it be said to be English as well? Ten years earlier, the leading British chefs were French. Five years later, they would be British, Ramsay among them. High church and low were united into a distinctly successful middle, with a broad London accent.

In 1995, Aubergine—fully booked months in advance—won a Michelin star. Ramsay was unable to celebrate.

"Minutes later, I found out that Marco won three. Do you know how depressing that was?"

Ramsay was back in New York in December, his third visit. The day before, he had been in the Welsh hills, coaxing a French ram—called Jean-Baptiste, after Ramsay's French maître d' in New York—to mate with two Welsh ewes. "I stood there screaming at him in the rain, 'Shag, you fucker, shag! If you don't like Charlotte, then shag Catherine, for fuck's sake!'" (One ewe had been named after Charlotte Church, the pop opera singer; the other after the actress Catherine Zeta-Jones.) Ramsay's hope was to put their issue out to pasture in early March on Wandsworth Common, baby lambs frolicking in a public space in southwest London, and slaughter them for an Easter supper that would be filmed for his series "The F Word." He'd done this kind of thing in an earlier episode, raising turkeys in his back garden, each one named after a cheerful English food-television personality: Nigella (Lawson), Jamie (Oliver), and Delia (Smith) among the flock. The turkeys were cared for by Ramsay's four children, who, in mid-December, helped kill them by electric shock and roasted them.

On Ramsay's return, I was allowed on the other side of the pass—I put on whites and was free to "trail" at any of the stations. (New cooks trail the others to learn their routines.) There I started to appreciate what the kitchen was like with Ramsay in it. "We love it when Gordon is here," I was told by Alistair Wise, the pastry chef, an Australian. "No politics, no jostling for position—it's his way or the highway, everything decisive." Alistair hadn't seen much outside of the kitchen since he moved to New York in November. His hours were such—he left at two-thirty in the morning and was back by seven—that he didn't know his cellphone number, having had no occasion to use it. "But let's not kid ourselves. This is an opening. A Gordon Ramsay opening." (Neil, the head chef, hadn't had a day off in two months.)

There was also a theatrical wildness about Ramsay's returns, and a feeling that something unexpected was going to happen, if only because no one knew what Ramsay would say or do next.

Markus Glocker, an Austrian, was on the meat station and rushed a pigeon up to the pass. Neil cut it. It wasn't cooked. Ramsay stared at it, horrified. "We're in our second month. How is this possible?" he said quietly, and then turned. "Markus, this isn't even pink. This is raw!" He jabbed the meat. "Fuck me, it's cold! This will make vegetarians out of the whole table." And the anger, once provoked ("You're shafting us!"), proceeded through the familiar gradations of fury ("Get a grip, I'm watching you"), escalating with each outburst, until finally Ramsay pushed Markus aside and cooked the next pigeon himself. (Ramsay, more a player-coach than a coach, seemed to relish being able to jump into a station.)

The next day, Mussie Emmetu, a Swede, overcooked a red mullet, and Ramsay grabbed the pan and stuck Mussie's forefinger into the fish ("Touch it. Feel that? It's still cooking!"), then followed the waiter bearing the dish away, dragging Mussie after him, pulling him along by a sleeve. "Look. It's on the plate and still cooking." They stood at the entrance to the dining room. "A full minute, it arrives at the table, and it's *still* cooking. They haven't touched it. Fifteen more seconds, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, and they're finally picking up their forks, and it is *still* cooking."

Ramsay returned to the kitchen. "Tomorrow I'm making them run round Central Park to insure that they hate me more—that'll help them focus."

What was wrong? "I wonder if it's Dale," Ramsay had said on his last visit. Dale MacKay, the sous-chef, had worked at Ramsay's operations in Tokyo. "He has the potential, but needs to find his voice. He's not running the brigade. They're running him." Dale, a quiet Canadian with bushy brown eyebrows and boyish good looks, had a naturally soft manner. "Look at him," Ramsay whispered. "When there's a problem, he sulks. It's not good enough," and Ramsay took him aside and had a word.

Now, on Ramsay's return, Dale may not have found his voice but he had located its volume. "Your sauce," he shouted at Mussie—so loudly that everyone stopped—"is fucked! It's fucked. It's totally fucked. It's sizzling." But the profanity seemed unnatural, as though it had been rehearsed.

Ramsay addressed Dale directly: "They're making a cunt out of you, big boy. If you don't take charge soon, they will make you into the biggest cunt in New York." The next day, a braised oxtail had been cooked so long it was mush. Ramsay spotted it, reacting in predictable fashion, and called over Neil and Dale.

"Neil, if I hadn't been here, what would you have done with that oxtail?"

"I wouldn't have served it. I would have sent the dish on without it." The oxtail was accompanied by a beef fillet.

"Dale?"

"I wouldn't have sent it out." But Ramsay didn't believe him. He stared hard at Dale.

"How can I reach the next level?" Ramsay asked. "I want to fold bone marrow into the oxtail, but they can't do the basic preparation." That night, he didn't leave after the kitchen closed down. "I sat there," he said, pointing to the chef's table, "wondering if I should spend the night. But I couldn't sleep. I kept asking what was wrong."

The next day, Ramsay studied his kitchens. The brigade that cooked the food for the bar didn't have the jumpy nervousness that you saw in the fine-dining operation, maybe because it wasn't performing for a Michelin inspector's potential three stars or the *Times* restaurant critic's potential four. The man in charge—Josh Emett, a tall, thin New Zealander with extreme upright posture and the withering manner of an English Second World War colonel—seemed to regard his cooks with such open contempt that I was surprised by how relaxed they appeared. The bar brigade had its own menu—smaller plates, although often with a tricky piece of execution—and one that seemed more cheerfully ideological, French-English with irony (what Ramsay called "proud to be British," accomplished but not too serious): a roasted sablefish with Indian-takeout ingredients (ginger, curry, and onion bhaji); a B.L.T. in a cocktail glass, filled with jellies flavored by the sandwich ingredients; a two-cut beef dish aptly described as a "tongue 'n' cheek." The prices—the best value in New York—had been deliberately set low, Ramsay told me, to encourage people to spend more on wine, an upmarket restaurant's greatest potential profit (no overhead, no spoiled ingredients). Ramsay had given Gregory Condes, the sommelier, a twenty-seven-year-old hired from Las Vegas ("We wanted an American selling wines to Americans"), seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to get the list started, a staggering sum, but it was scarcely enough. That night, James Lloyd, one of Condes's assistants, was serving the chef's table, eight young men from a hedge-fund company, who ordered a thousand-dollar bottle of 1970 Latour ("Keep back a glass for us," Ramsay whispered) and, midway through, were approaching the ten-thousand-dollar mark. (James kept Ramsay informed like someone reporting a sports score.) The next night, the chef's table was reserved by Goldman Sachs: "budget not important," I was told, possibly a fifty-thousand-dollar wine bill. (At Pétrus, a Ramsay restaurant in London, six bankers once spent sixty-three thousand dollars on dinner. Five of them were fired after they tried to expense it, a story that was reported in just about every paper in London. "It was a year before we saw another banker," Ramsay said.)

Ramsay sipped the Latour and made a face ("It's a little bit finished, isn't it?") and passed it to me.

"I wish we could do liver," he said suddenly. "But Americans don't eat offal, do they? Or kidneys? Or black pudding? You never see black pudding." He seemed to be searching. "Short ribs. That's what everyone wants. Every restaurant has short ribs." He was interrupted by Cedric, a French waiter, who was showing an English couple the kitchen, the tenth English tour that evening, and Ramsay joined them for a photograph, able to be both charming ("Oh, no, the beautiful woman goes in the middle") and in character ("Cedric, what have you done to your hair?"—as the waiter tried to get everyone into the viewfinder. "Your head looks like a testicle"). One afternoon, a window-washer from Manchester came through ("Five quid a house"), the trip and meal a birthday present from his girlfriend. "They know me," Ramsay explained. "I'm one of them." But it was a confusing way to be in New York: in a sealed-off room full of English accents.

"So tell me about Thanksgiving," Ramsay asked. "It's a big holiday, is it?"

The biggest of the year.

"Like Easter in Britain? Everyone takes four days off?"

Maybe bigger.

"Bigger than Easter? And we opened the week before? Fucking clueless, aren't we?" The restaurant was having difficulty finding its rhythm. Another English party came through. "I can't wait for them all to go home."

"Where is Long Island exactly?" Josh asked. I'd been describing bay scallops, the shellfish from Long Island Sound. (The kitchen had confused them with sea scallops and had been rebuked by a customer. "We didn't know," Ramsay said, perplexed.)

"Which direction is Central Park?" someone else asked.

"What's a Russian tearoom?"

Then, after service, Mussie got mugged on his way home. Then Cedric got mugged. I saw him after he came out of the hospital—an eye full of blood, his cheek crushed, stitches, double vision.

Diners were stealing a silver piece designed for resting your knife and fork on: thirty-eight had gone in the first week. There was a no-show problem. Five last night. Four the night before. There were only twelve tables. Ramsay wouldn't say New Yorkers were rude. He blamed himself.

And then, in response to the obvious need to do something, Ramsay rose to another level of frenzy. He demoted Dale, moving him to the bar brigade, and replaced him with Josh, who, as Neil's new sous-chef, immediately established his authority by making the cooks realize that they were snivelling, loathsome insects who deserved to be degraded and publicly humiliated. ("Blimey," Ramsay said. "Did you hear Josh? He didn't care if the chef's table was there or not, did he?") He began revising again—adding dishes, redoing others, embellishing them with caviar, truffles, foie gras. He introduced a venison special on roasted beets with a red-wine sauce made with chocolate and star anise. The next day, he added cabbage, then a purée of roasted parsnips along the plate rim. He changed the scallop dish. "What about quail eggs on top, fried in goose fat?" Then: "And white truffle on top?" (The result, which I tasted with the chefs, seemed to combine sea, farm, and earth in one bite. It was transporting.)

"Now Gordon is being Gordon," Jean-Baptiste, the maître d', said. "I don't like to say this, but in the beginning the dishes were safe. Now they are riskier."

For a seafood tortellini, Ramsay made an extravagant crisp—grated parmesan dropped into a hot nonstick pan, a white truffle sliced into it when half melted. He seemed almost desperate. He abandoned a foie-gras dish and replaced it with one done three ways. He spent two days working on a jelly to go with it ("Too ducky, too strong, more herbal, please!"). He made a rectangle of lobster, cooked in fat and trimmed to fit a crispy toast, packed with geometric greens: a Caesar salad, reinvented. He wanted a version of an English breakfast, but wasn't sure how to make it. Some Parma ham instead of bacon. Some soft scrambled eggs. Beans? He was out of time. He'd been invited to cook Christmas dinner for the British troops in Afghanistan. He left for Kabul.

That night, Frank Bruni, the critic for the *Times*, ate at the restaurant. "He had a good time," Jean-Baptiste told me. "But tell me. Are we dreaming? You know Gordon wants nothing less than four stars."

By March, 1998, Aubergine had earned its second Michelin star and was so successful that Ramsay, with the backing of the Italian bankers, opened a second restaurant, L'Oranger, on St. James's Street, where he installed his sous-chef, Marcus Wareing. There was talk of a bistro; an Aubergine in New York, in Bermuda; and the Italians asked Ramsay and Wareing to sign multiyear contracts. The prospect made Ramsay uneasy. Although a part owner, he says he never saw the books. "Every now and then, an Italian showed up and gave me a check for a few thousand quid"—Ramsay, in debt, was also working as a consultant for a supermarket chain, devising ready-made dinners—"but we knew the money bore no relation to what the restaurants were earning. Where was it going? We couldn't pay our fish bills." (Giuliano Lotto, by now the head of the company, says that Ramsay never understood the finances: "The restaurant was unprofitable. We were only able to pay him a dividend once—a check for fifteen thousand pounds.") Ramsay wanted his own place. He was now married—his wife, Tana, a Montessori-school teacher, was pregnant with their first child—and he had his eye on a nearby property. He tried to stall his bosses while he negotiated the lease, nurturing a fantasy that he could run Aubergine until the last moment and then—*voilà!*—miraculously open his own, about-to-be-three-star establishment.

The stalling made Ramsay's bosses feel vulnerable. They pressed Ramsay hard. He thought he was about to be fired. Then he became convinced that he was going to be replaced by Marco Pierre White.

Was this a paranoid delusion? White was said to have Aubergine's menus on his desk, which convinced Ramsay that his fear was well founded. By now, he was obsessed: he got a bad review in the *Sunday Times*, and concluded that Marco was behind it, a conspiracy designed to delay the inevitable—the recognition that Ramsay was the best cook in the country. White, at the age of thirty-three, had been the youngest chef in Britain to earn three Michelin stars; Ramsay, at thirty-one, still had a chance at that distinction.

Then a man on a motor scooter pulled up in front of Aubergine, entered, grabbed the reservation book, and bolted. Pandemonium. At a time when reservations were not computerized, the book *was* the business: in it were six months of sales. The next day, a sheet of the previous day's reservations was faxed to the restaurant. "And they even spelled my name wrong," Ramsay told the *Evening Standard*, and expressed a suspicion that many came to believe: that this was the work of White, who had decided to sabotage the business in order to make it his own. It seemed far-fetched, but the Italian partners stopped talking to White. White denied his involvement, and denied it again to me when I recently asked him about it.

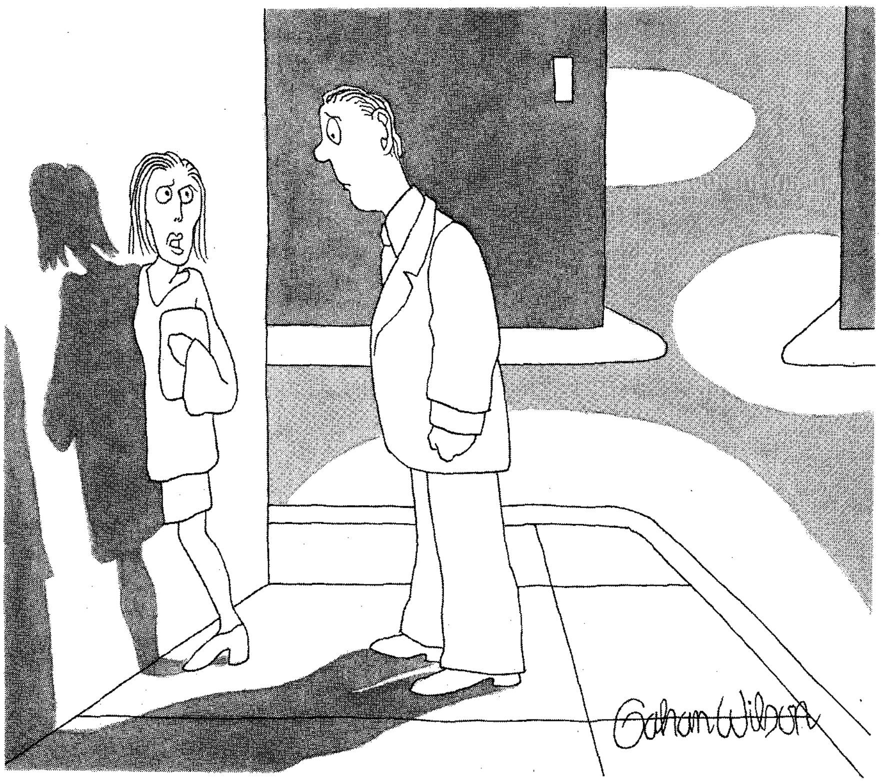
Four months later, the restaurant was somehow still in business (pages from the reservation book regularly appearing on the fax machine), and Ramsay's bosses renewed their efforts to get those contracts signed. Ramsay continued to stall. "They wanted to lock us in," said Wareing, who was still uncomfortable and didn't sign. Then he was fired. "To this day, I still don't know why. I think I was a small pawn in a much bigger chess game." His staff vandalized the kitchen and then walked out. Two days later, so did Ramsay, and, virtually the next day, he moved to his new restaurant, named after himself. *Voilà!* (The Italians sued Ramsay for a million pounds. A settlement was reached in 2000.)

The story is the background for "Boiling Point," a four-part documentary about the new restaurant's first months and Ramsay's effort to get that third star. It is the coarsest depiction of the realities of a kitchen you're likely ever to see. At the time, Ramsay recalled, "Jamie Oliver was breaking out on the BBC—the Naked Chef, the guy who could do no wrong, the savior—and there was Nigella Lawson and Gary Rhodes and Delia Smith, all this ass-kissy-kissy television, with makeup and long shots and closeups, and let's-edit-it-all-down-so-I-look-good. And then there was me, this oaf."

The rawness was Ramsay's anger, at a particularly high pitch, because he had so much at stake: with virtually no assets, he had borrowed two million pounds to start his restaurant, and everything was on the line. But, viewing the film now, I was also struck by the familiar nature of Ramsay's struggles. On the first day, a cook runs out of salad midway through service, and Ramsay threatens to fire him. Unreasonable? (The cook, Mark Sargeant, now runs Ramsay's restaurant at Claridge's.) Another cook, instructed to bring to the pass three so-called cappuccini (frothy soup made of white beans and morels) *after* a table has had its first course, brings them to the pass *before* their first course, and Ramsay becomes angry. Unjustified? No, although his response is a little hysterical (he takes the tray of cappuccini and throws it crashing into the sink). A waiter drinks from a water bottle in view of the diners and is fired on the spot. Another one is seen rooting around Ramsay's feet. The man had dropped a roll, according to Ramsay, and had put it back in the bread basket. This is unforgivable, but so is Ramsay's response: he hits him. ("You could hear the crack—*crack!*" Ramsay recalls. "The fact he had no hair, unfortunately, meant that it made a very big sound, like a whip. *Crack!*")

Ramsay had never seen his anger before. "I looked at a clip"—he still hasn't watched the film in its entirety—"and I saw I needed controlling. I don't regret making it, because that was me at that time. But I was shocked. No one had ever shown me *me* in real life."

The restaurant didn't get its third star that year, but it didn't matter: the film made Ramsay's career, launching the Ramsay persona. "But it was the wrong



"Well, if you can't walk through walls this is where I say goodbye."

me. I don't want to sound like a sad fuck, because the film opened so many doors for me"—in effect, all the television that Ramsay now does—"but it was the wrong me." And then, within days, he saw the effects. "The phone was going mad. I mean, like mad, mad, mad." The film said: Cooking is more important than life. You saw this intensity and thought, I want to taste this man's food.

"Tell me again about the reservation book," I said. Ramsay and I were at Soho House, the bar full of pink light, on a cold December evening, the sun setting on the Hudson. It was the first time I'd been with him out of the kitchen, and he was more relaxed and forthcoming. I was starting to understand why he was so liked. He hid nothing. "Who took it? One of the partners?"

"It was me," Ramsay said. "I nicked it. I blamed Marco. Because I knew that would fuck him and that it would call off the dogs."

"You got a biker to steal it?"

"Yeah. You're the first person I ever told. I still have the book in a safe at home."

"Marco had nothing to do with it?"

"Fuck all. But it hurt him. It was my one stroke of genius, fucking someone over without his knowing that I was the one who done it. And the Italians cutting Marco off and wanting to get closer to me, kissing my ass—'What do you suggest? Can we sit down and start negotiating again?' You always eat that fucking revenge when it's cold, don't you? Trust me, this was stone cold. Oooh . . . even now it sends a chill down my spine. Because it would have been all over if I'd been caught. But that's the risk you take, isn't it?" He paused and seemed to reflect on where he was. "The risks just keep getting bigger."

LITTLEFOOT, 34

It's dark now, but I remember the five-fingered jaundiced leaves
Seeming to hover above the earth this afternoon
On the tips, the dull tips, of grass blades
                    under the maple tree,
The dogwood berries on Locust Avenue like scarlet cluster bombs,
Automobiles and ambulance sirens
                    cutting the sundown, October air,
Thinking, this isn't at all bad, not even one bit,
All the way to the hospital, and all the way back.
And now here's Mars, like a pancake orange,
Northeast in the bleached-star sky,
                    and that's not at all bad, either,
End of October, end of a buffed and edgeless day.

Halloween, All Hallow's Eve.
                    And what if they came back,
All of them, what would we say?
That the moon looks good through the limbs of the chinaberry tree?
That the night air is as easy as oil on the skin?
That the children parading in their pathetic little costumes
                    have it right?
That the give in the natural world
Is as good as the take in the supernatural other?
That the moon looks good and the stars still refuse to shine?
What would we say, Slick, what would we say,
Our hands like skeletal party gloves,
                    our masks future faces?

I think of the masters of a century ago,
And often wish they'd come and whisper their secrets in my ear,
My right ear, the good one. Not all, perhaps, but a couple.

The fallen leaves
                    litter the lawn and driveway. Autumn.
Indian summer. Nothing ripples.
The other side of the world, they say, is a door
                    where I'll find my life again.

Ramsay returned to New York on New Year's Day, intending to catch the restaurant by surprise, arriving in the afternoon, after an all-night dinner hosted by Victoria and David Beckham in the English countryside. I met him at the airport and accompanied him to the kitchen, where he got an understated British welcome: not so much as a wry smile of recognition, even though he hadn't been seen for two weeks. The place, which had the tranquil hum of a low-watt machine, was unprecedentedly calm.

It was the end of the hangover lunch service. The night before, there had been three New Year's Eve marriage proposals—more English couples. ("Now, maybe, *please*, they'll go home.") On the preceding Wednesday, Frank Bruni had returned. And one of the most important members of the Ramsay team, the sommelier Gregory Condes, had been fired, after letting himself into one of the unfinished hotel rooms at five in the morning. There had been other complaints—a party after hours with bottles of Dom Pérignon, squatting in a hotel room and trashing it, strippers from Las Vegas. Condes had protested his innocence. Most Las Vegas residents have strippers for friends, he told me ("It's really quite normal, although they prefer to be called dancers"), and, besides, he hadn't taken "bottles" of Dom Pérignon. ("That's wrong. I took just one, plus a bottle of Perrier Jouët. Belle Epoque, actually"—the champagne maker's prestige label.) He had left voice-mail instructions with his "beverage team" to gather at a nearby Starbucks.

Ramsay called him on the kitchen

New moon like a jai-alai basket
just over the doctor's rooftop,
Cradling the old moon before her fall.

If angels can see into the ends and beginnings of things,
Why are they still among us
Like widowed birds, circling, circling,
their poor go-betweens at a full stop?

The cold gowns of the masters,
those of a thousand years ago,
Over a thousand, and then some,
Wander the countryside,
brushing like loose crystal against the sumac.
Who here can inhabit them?
Whose arms among us can fill their sleeves,
So clear and transparent, so radiant in the dark?

My neighbor's maple tree shines like a galleon in the dusk,
Kumquat and blood orange,
pomegranate and nectarine.
Within such splendor, everything falls away, even our names,
All trace of our being here, breathed in by the night's lips.
This is as close as we get to them,
Their tinkling crystal folds just ahead of us
how sweet a sound.

Is there an emptiness we all share?
Before the end, I mean.
Heaven and earth depend on this clarity,
heaven and earth.
Under the gold doubloons of the fallen maple leaves,
The underworld burrows in,
sick to death of the light.

—*Charles Wright*

phone, the most public place to have a private conversation.

"Gregory—" Ramsay said, and was interrupted.

"Gregory—

"Gregory . . . Will you be quiet for a minute? We know what you did. The room locks are computerized, and it's on closed-circuit TV. So just shut up and get a grip. What you did is unforgivable. You celebrated too early. We're not a success yet, and we've got a long way to go." I'd been expecting a profane explosion, but Ramsay could have been talking to a child. It occurred to me that he gets angry with people who matter. Condes no longer mattered. "Gregory, I know you work hard. We all work hard. Do you think you work harder than the others? Of course not. But then for you to do what you did—trashing the room like that—and those bottles, of all bottles. It was just so flash, so wrong." Everyone in the kitchen looked grave. The problem was not unusual in a business trading in luxuries and cash. In London, at the Savoy, Ramsay currently had a case of sticky fingers: cash tips had inexplicably stopped, and he had hired several diners to eat there secretly—Ramsay routinely pays people to dine clandestinely and report their impressions—and leave big cash tips, single fifty-pound notes. None had turned up. (A staff member would be sacked.) But Gregory's misdemeanor was of a different order: it had occurred in New York, seven weeks into an ambitious start-up that people had committed their reputations and waking hours to.

"Gregory. Listen. You are to cancel this Starbucks meeting and move on. Your time here is now over."

The sacking of the "cancerous" Gregory had a bracing effect. A prep cook made the mistake of complaining about his commute ("What? He wants the restaurant to come to him?") and was told he didn't have to do it again. Two guys making the amuse-bouches, a small version of the reinvented Caesar salad, dressed the croutons in advance. "So you work for a Subway sandwich shop? Pretend you're the customer. Why would you want a soggy crouton?" Ramsay asked and, without moving, shouted for Neil, somewhere behind him, and asked him to pay their salaries. "I'll give you back the money next week," he said, still staring at the two cooks. "I just want you to know how stupid it feels to be paying these cunts out of your own pocket so they can then come here and not do their job." But it wasn't just staffing. At three in the morning, Ramsay (in his fiftieth hour without sleep) went through the fridges and found them filled with lobster and foie gras that had been prepared but weren't being used: no one knew they were there. ("I could have pissed myself. Neil, I wanted to phone you, even at that hour." Neil was looking beaten. "I wish you had, Gordon.") Ramsay examined Gregory's wine cellar—bottles everywhere, no locks ("Don't think for a moment he's the only one who stole something"). He went through the reservations. The restaurant was losing twenty thousand a week in no-shows (fourteen on New Year's Eve), and every Monday Ramsay was ordering a hundred thousand dollars from the U.K. He called a meeting.

In all this, no one doubted the food itself, except Jean-Baptiste, and only playfully, as he continued to applaud each new dish—Ramsay was still adding two, sometimes three a day—celebrating it as proof that Gordon was finally becoming

"This is a minor setback. The hunter-gatherer economy is still good."

• •

Gordon. But the food, both the not quite Gordon dishes and the real Gordon ones, was noticeably different from what you might eat at a comparable New York restaurant. I was also surprised by how different it seemed to be from its volatile, unpredictable chef.

I'd been expecting fire, a plate of Ramsay's rage—intensities, clashing flavors, high contrast—and I now suspect that I'd fallen for the culinary equivalent of the pathetic fallacy: dinner as a direct expression of the person making it. I wasn't alone. Ramsay's reputation precedes his arrival. In America it has been fashioned by "Hell's Kitchen": a dozen semi-competent cooks in a "reality" showdown, with lots of bleeped-out expletives, in which Ramsay, already an extreme personality, emerges as an extreme caricature of an extreme personality. Could rawness be a brand? It was a gamble: big numbers, but it seemed unlikely that Ramsay would find his restaurant audience among the millions watching him on TV. He once told me that, in contemplating the prospect of doing business in America, he had considered Las Vegas, and rejected it: easy money, but the wrong people. "I want to cook for serious diners, the kind you find in New York, or Los Angeles, or Paris." Whether or not New York diners deserve such respect, they were finding it hard to separate their TV from their dinner. You could see the theme in titles of the first reviews: " 'Hell's Kitchen' Star Gordon Ramsay's New York Début Falls Short of Heavenly" (*New York*), "Ferocious Chef Ramsay Opens Pussycat NYC Eatery" (Bloomberg). Ruth Reichl, the editor of *Gourmet*, writing in a blog on the magazine's Web site, expressed disappointment that the "guy who's known as the foulest-mouthed chef in Britain" hadn't done more "in the way of fireworks." The cooking, described as flawless, did little to "wow you"—a complaint that would become a theme. (It was incomprehensible to Ramsay. "Is it because my menu descriptions are so plain?")

But perhaps Ramsay's food is deliberately without fireworks. For instance, he stuffs a rabbit loin with a hazelnut-and-chicken mousse: a synthesizing mixture, the ingredients basically the same color, the chicken and hazelnut picking up the mild flavors of the meat. He stuffs a rabbit leg with wild mushrooms. A chicken leg is stuffed with them as well. It's not that Ramsay forgot to use an exotic Asian fruit with a Latin chili paste, or any number of possible salty-citrusy-fruity-hot-spicy combinations to assault the palate and tell it that it had something new in there. The gastro-pseudoscientific trend of the moment is built around improbable combinations and dissonant flavor statements. Ramsay is seeking not contrasts but harmonies. Wild mushrooms and other fungi figure in so many dishes (truffles in the winter, morels in the spring, French cèpes in the fall, Italian porcini whenever possible) that they are probably Ramsay's emblematic ingredient. They accompany the sweetbreads, cooked slowly with artichokes until they complement the creamy insides of the sweetbreads themselves. They flavor a broth that the pigeon is poached in. They are the first element in the venison special, hidden underneath the roasted beets. These dishes are not inviting you to think about the person who made them: what matters is the food. In fact, the more I thought about the chef and what he makes, the more logic I found in the pathetic fallacy of the kitchen, after all. There is a relationship—it's just not the obvious one. Ramsay, a person of inner strife, finds tranquillity on the plate.

The kitchen meeting was at ten, in the empty dining room. Ramsay paused at the entrance.

"I hate that table."

I looked at it. It was bigger than the other tables, but not that much bigger.

"It pisses me off, that table."

He paced in front of it. A Web-site review that day had struck a nerve; it said that the feeling in the dining room was flat.

"Flat? How is that possible? The phone is ringing all the time. Flat?"

He looked again at the table. It was to blame. It took up too much of something: oxygen, energy, good feeling.

"Jean-Baptiste, get that thing out of my sight."

Ramsay then told Jean-Baptiste to put two smaller tables where the big table had been. He continued examining the room. "Is two enough?" he asked me, for no reason except that I happened to be standing there.

"No," he said definitively. "It's not." He paused, seeming to recalculate the space. "No. Three. Fuck me, maybe we should have four tables!"

"No, Gordon, please," Jean-Baptiste said. "Four would be too many."

"And we'll fill the room at the first seating," Ramsay added, ignoring his maître d', now very excited, his original proud concept of a luxurious service being crowded out before our eyes.

"And perhaps a prix-fixe theatre menu," Jean-Baptiste joined in, starting to get into the spirit of the thing.

"We'll pack them in. We'll *overwhelm* that lazy kitchen. A full house by six o'clock."

"And another full turn at nine."

"*Flat*? I can't believe that. *Flat*? It must never be flat."

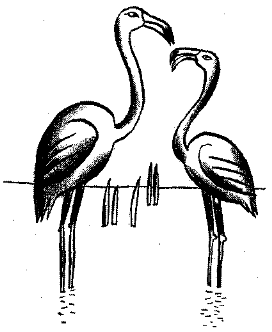
But then Jean-Baptiste lost his nerve. Was there room for the waiters?

"Oh, fuck off, J.B.," Ramsay said. "Look at this city. Go outside and look up. Those are skyscrapers. We're in *New York*. New Yorkers like crowds. They like being close together, otherwise they'd live somewhere else."

The meeting was duly held, and everyone put on notice, but by then the transformation was already in place. Tables were found, tablecloths produced ("No, don't press the fuckers, just smooth them out—the lunch service starts in minutes"). The effect was immediate and contagious. So much effort had gone into this already. Was it really just a matter of extra tables? Why not? That night, for the first time, the restaurant was full when it opened, with three more tables than before, and was alive with gab and hilarity and convivial tipsy noise. The following week, I ate there with a visitor from California, someone in the business, who observed, at the end, that he had just had one of the most seamless meals of his life: "No single course was an event—it just all flowed together magically." That was the Ramsay dining experience. My own notes begin with details of the first courses—the red mullet with grapefruit, the roasted sablefish with Indian-takeout ingredients (not normally on the fine-dining menu, but Josh was showing off)—and then drift into declarations of good feelings. This was the modern privilege of the restaurant experience: to be served and made happy without ever quite knowing how it was happening.

The next night, Ramsay returned to London, his work done, and Frank Bruni came back for his final visit. "He had a good time," Jean-Baptiste told me, with more authority than before. "But, I must be honest, we are worried." The concern was Bruni's blog, where he seemed to keep an impressionistic diary of his dinners out, including those eaten at restaurants he was about to review. Ramsay was featured on the blog four times; the posts included complaints about flashbulbs (another engaged British couple) and trouble the critic had working the latch to the toilet door. "Is this normal?" Jean-Baptiste asked innocently. He was used to Michelin inspectors who work anonymously and with high purpose, in part because their decisions can make or break a business. "Is this correct?"

The *Times* review appeared four weeks later, on January 31st: "FOR A BAD BOY CHEF, HE'S CERTAINLY POLITE"—a familiar title, a familiar theme. The first paragraph was devoted to Ramsay's television celebrity. The next paragraph was one sentence: "You might expect his debut New York restaurant to be brash and any of its shortcomings to be attributable to audacity, not timidity." If you did, you were wrong. The critic was bored by the dining room, found the use of truffles and foie gras predictable, the scallops dutiful. ("Is he so jaded," Ramsay asked me, "that a truffle is ordinary?") Bruni liked some items (the B.L.T. cocktail—another Josh addition), disliked others (the turbot poached in wine), but the food was less important than the man. "Seldom has a conquistador as bellicose as Mr. Ramsay landed with such a whisper," he wrote. "It's not an unappealing sound, but it's nothing that's going to prick up your ears." It was a devastating dismissal. Alain Ducasse, the last foreigner with a reputation to open a restaurant in New York, had got four stars in 2001. Bruni demoted it to three. On December 31st, Ducasse closed the business. Ramsay did not get three stars. He got two.



A black mood prevailed in the kitchen the next day. I lingered at the pass, as the lunch was being prepped, talking to two line cooks, both determined to press on, but both clearly depressed.

"It feels like there's been a death," one of them said.

"New Yorkers don't like foreigners, do they?" the other observed.

Ramsay was in California, filming the third season of "Hell's Kitchen," and then in Las Vegas, to preside over its finale. Next, he embarked on a new venture, an American version of "Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares," the successful British series in which Ramsay plays culinary doctor, entering real restaurants in real trouble and prescribing their cures. His first problem kitchen was in California, but during the shoot he fell ill after eating a dish prepared by one of the participants. (He discovered a refrigerator filled with water and a container of pesto covered with fur.) He then flew back to the East Coast for four more episodes, including one in an Italian restaurant and another in an Irish pub on Long Island. It was an impossible schedule and a very "hard slog." Nobody quite understood him, and one of the chefs whose nightmare kitchen Ramsay was trying to save steadfastly refused to make dishes from scratch. ("I just couldn't get through. He really liked the tiramisù he got from Restaurant Depot.") Meanwhile, his younger brother, a more typical child of a council estate, had been arrested in Bali for heroin possession.

Ramsay returned to the New York restaurant in March. He had been away for two months. The Channel 4 documentary, charting his effort to get three Michelin stars in America, wasn't going to be made. It was immaterial. He had other problems. He focussed his attention on his head chef. "Neil was being taken advantage of. I needed a Rottweiler. I had a golden retriever instead." He replaced him with Josh.

"When I came here," Ramsay told me, "I expected to get kicked in the nuts. I have been. I have also been knocked down." He seemed subdued, vulnerable, confused. He asked his wife to fly out from London. He was lonely. America was turning out to be such an elusive, difficult country. ♦

LETTER FROM EUROPE

THE POPE AND ISLAM

Is there anything that Benedict XVI would like to discuss?

BY JANE KRAMER

These are fierce theological times. It should come as no surprise that the Vatican and Islam are not getting along, or that their problems began long before Pope Benedict XVI made his unfortunate reference to the Prophet Muhammad, in a speech in Regensburg last September, and even before the children of Europe's Muslim immigrants discovered beards, burkas, and jihad. There are more than a billion Catholics in the world, and more than a billion Muslims. And what divides the most vocal and rigidly orthodox interpreters of their two faiths, from the imams of Riyadh and the ayatollahs of Qom to the Pope himself, is precisely the things that Catholicism and Islam have always had in common: a purchase on truth; a contempt for the moral accommodations of liberal, secular states; a strong imperative to censure, convert, and multiply; and a belief that Heaven, and possibly earth, belongs exclusively to them.

It is well known that Benedict wants to transform the Church of Rome, which is not to say that he wants to make it more responsive to the realities of modern life as it is lived by Catholic women in the West, or by Catholic homosexuals, or even by the millions of desperately poor Catholic families in the Third World who are still waiting for some merciful dispensation on the use of contraception. He wants to purify the Church, to make it more definitively Christian, more observant, obedient, and disciplined—you could say more like the way he sees Islam. And never mind that he doesn't seem to like much about Islam, or that he has doubts about Islam's direction. (His doubts are not unusual in today's world; many Muslims have them.) The Pope is a theologian—the first prominent theologian to sit on Peter's throne since the eighteenth century. He views the world through a strictly theological frame, and his judgments about Islam, however defiant or reductive they sometimes sound, have finally to do with the idea of Theos—God—as he understands it. Those judgments have not changed much, in character, since he left Germany for the Vatican, twenty-six years ago.

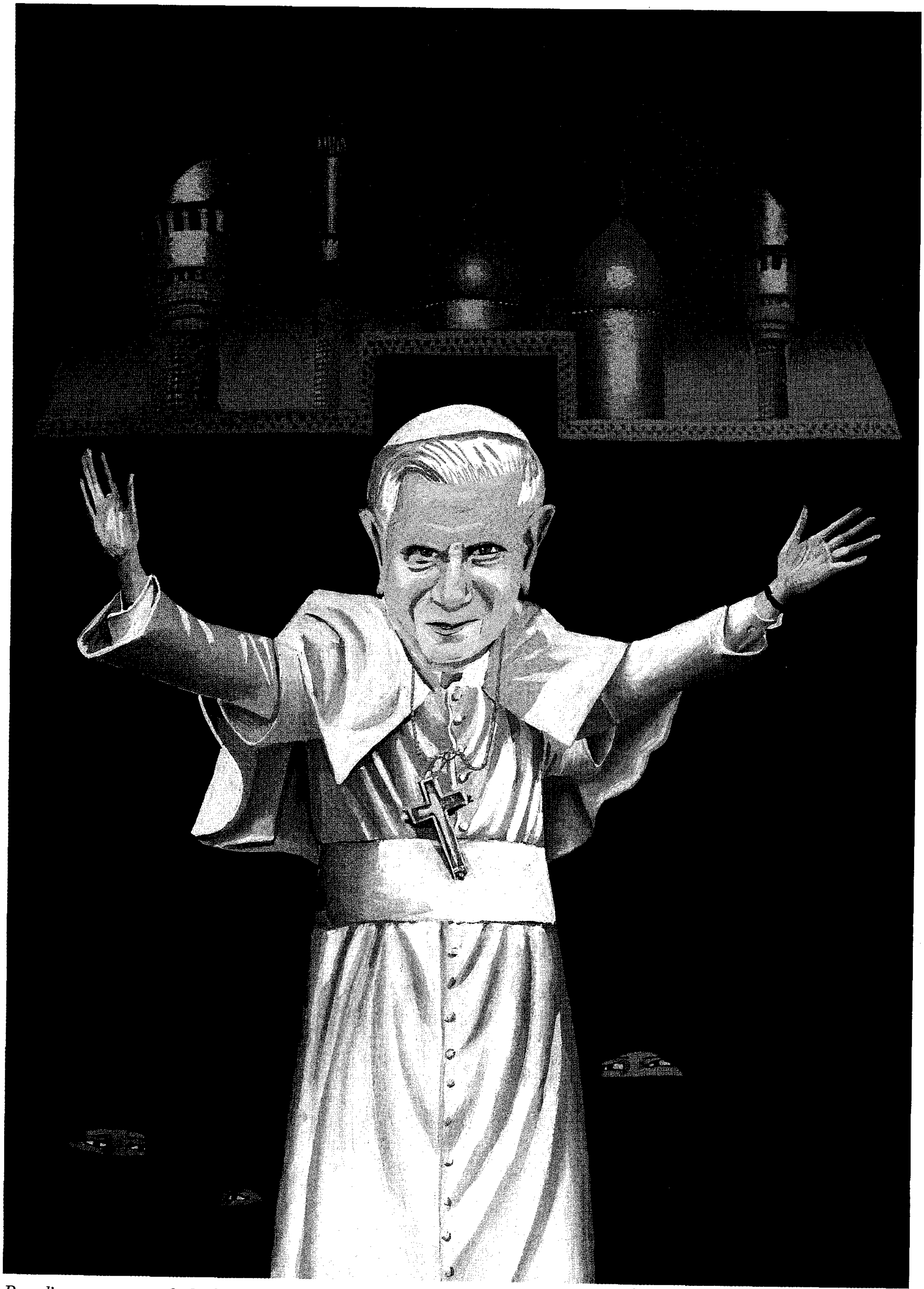
In 1997, when the Pope was still Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and beginning his seventeenth year as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, otherwise known as the Holy Office, or the Inquisition, he told the German journalist Peter Seewald, "Islam has a total organization of life that is completely different from ours; it embraces simply everything. . . . One has to have a clear understanding that it is not simply a denomination that can be included in the free realm of pluralistic society." In 2004, the year before his election to the papacy, he elaborated on that dismissive thought for the German secular philosopher Jürgen Habermas, during a long recorded conversation in Munich. Talking about the "normative elements" in human rights—rights that in the West, by consensus, are not subjected to "the vagaries of majorities"—Ratzinger brought up Islam. He said that "Islam has defined its own catalogue of human rights, which differs from the Western catalogue" and from the West's understanding of the "self-subsistent values that flow from the essence of what it is to be a man"—values that may not be readily apparent beyond "the Christian realm" or "the Western rational tradition." What he does seem to admire about Islam is its insistent presence at the center of most Muslims' lives.

Islam has been in Europe for thirteen hundred years. Arab armies were at the gates of Poitiers, in central France, in 732—only a hundred years after the Prophet died and more than three hundred and fifty years before the start of the First Crusade—and southern Spain was still under Islamic rule in the fifteenth century, some two hundred years after the knights of the Ninth Crusade straggled home. But Benedict is the first Pope to have developed what could be called an active theological policy toward Islam, as opposed to, say, a military or political one—"the first really functioning Pope in the post-September 11th world," Daniel Madigan calls him. Madigan, who is one of the Vatican's most prominent, and liberal, advisers on Christian-Muslim relations, runs the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures at the Jesuits' Pontifical Gregorian University, arguably the most intellectually independent of Rome's Catholic institutions. It is probably safe to say that many of the faculty had been hoping for a more doctrinally liberated Pope. They acknowledge Benedict, though, as an intellectual, and, from a critical distance, recognize his purpose in what Madigan calls "laying down challenges to Islam, telling Muslims, 'We need to do some hard talking.'"

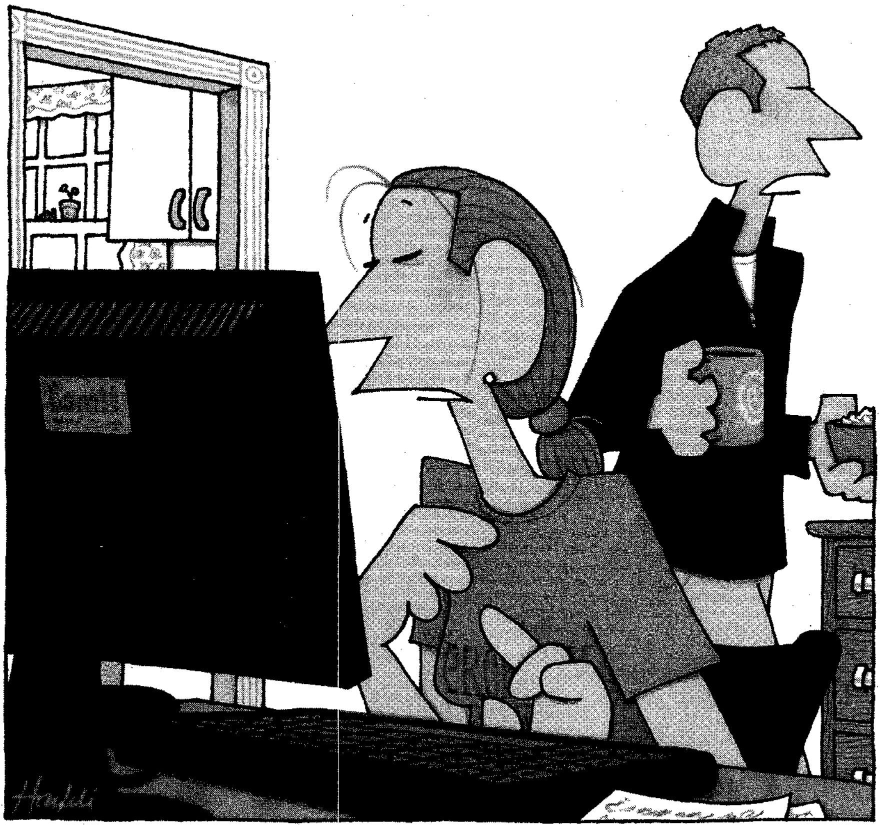
Still, not even a Jesuit could explain what the Pope intended when he addressed a group of theologians at the University of Regensburg in September, beginning a speech that could best be described as a scholarly refutation of the so-called Kantian fallacy—Kant's distinction between rational understanding and apprehension of the sublime—with a question posed by a fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor to a Persian guest at his winter barracks near Ankara. "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new," the emperor asked the Persian, "and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

The problem for people who actually read the speech (by most reports, very few did) was that the Pope chose not to dispute the emperor's statement. He allowed that the emperor had spoken with a "startling brusqueness," but he did not say whether he disagreed, nor, for that matter, did he acknowledge that Christianity

MARK ULRIKSEN



Benedict wants to purify the Church, to make it more observant, obedient, and disciplined—more like the way he sees Islam.



"How's the self-diagnosis coming?"

• •

had contributed its share of inhumanity to history. He quoted from the emperor's argument against violent conversion—"God is not pleased by blood, and not acting reasonably is contrary to God's nature"—and contrasted that with a modern scholarly reading of the Islamist argument *for* it: "In Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories—even that of rationality." After that, he did not mention Islam again. Marco Politi, the Vatican correspondent for *La Repubblica*, who heard the speech, says it was "like a typical Protestant Sunday sermon, with the quote as the proposition, the passage to be examined—only it wasn't examined."

People at the Vatican quickly covered for Benedict. Some said that he must have been talking a Regensburg shorthand; he had taught at Regensburg for most of the nineteen-seventies, and it could be argued that, in such a familiar academic context, his disclaimer was implicit. A few joked that, being an academic, he had simply given in to a professionally irresistible temptation to show off with an obscure citation. But many of the Vatican correspondents who, like Politi, travelled to Regensburg with Benedict doubt that there was anything accidental or inadvertent in the citation. They had received copies of his speech at six in the morning of the day he gave it, and, at ten, they assembled in the university's makeshift pressroom and informed the Vatican spokesman, a Jesuit priest and Vatican Radio director named Federico Lombardi, that the passage was going to be incendiary. "The point is that at 10 A.M. somebody got the message that the text was explosive," Politi told me, adding that when the Pope had gone to Auschwitz to speak, last May, "we got copies of that speech, too, and it never mentioned the Shoah, so we said, 'Hey, where is Shoah?,' and he changed it." Putting aside the obvious question of whether reporters should be in the business of saving Popes from embarrassment, the question remains whether Benedict got the message.

Father Lombardi, a soft-spoken man who at the time was only two months into his job as the Vatican's official spinner, told me, "I don't know the intentions of the Pope. I do know that his Regensburg speech was directed to the culture of the West; it wasn't given to engage Muslims." But, of course, it did. Within a day of the speech, riots and protests had broken out across the Muslim world. Before the worst of them ended, a week later, Benedict XVI had been burned in effigy in Basra; an Anglican church and a Greek Orthodox church had been fire bombed in Nablus; and an Italian nun had been murdered in Mogadishu, in front of the children's hospital where she worked. In Europe, young Muslims took to the streets, calling for the Pope's death and waving placards that said "Islam will conquer Rome" and "Jesus is the slave of Allah."

The loudest voices, not surprisingly, were the first heard. Sheikh Abu Saqer, the head of the Salafiya Jihadiya movement in Gaza, called angrily for the conquest and conversion of Rome: "This is a crusader war against Islam, and it is our holy duty to fight all those who support the Pope. . . . The green flag of Allah and Muhammad will be raised over the Vatican. . . . Until they join Islam, Hell is their destination." In Tehran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei announced that the Pope's speech was the "latest link" in the "chain of a conspiracy to set in motion a crusade." And Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami told Iranians, "The Muslim outcry will continue until he fully regrets his remarks."

The Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, at Oxford, described this "counterproductive game" in late September, when he wrote that Muslim leaders who lend their voices to an angry mob protesting a "perceived insult to their faith" might well reflect on the consequences of "manipulating crises of this kind as a safety valve for both their restive populations and their own political agenda." Ramadan has roots in Egypt (where his grandfather founded the Muslim Brotherhood) and in Europe (where he was born and raised), and he has cultivated a reputation as a kind of mediator between the Muslims of those two worlds, an interpreter of one to the other. He said that crises like Regensburg, with their "uncontrollable outpouring of emotion, end up providing a living proof that Muslims cannot engage in reasonable debate and that verbal aggression and violence are more the rule than the exception."

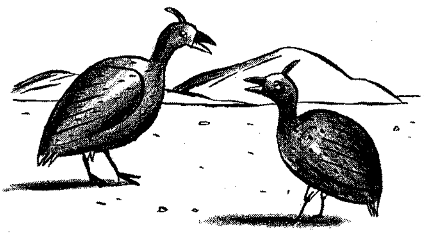
Joseph Ratzinger and his predecessor Karol Wojtyla were the first "foreigners," as Italians still call them, to be elected to the papacy since 1522, when a priest from Utrecht began twenty uneventful months as Pope Adrian VI. The forty-five Pontiffs who followed Adrian were not only reliably homegrown; they were rarely driven to extremes of Christian ardor, and Italians liked them that way—for their self-interest and their discretion. Popes were not expected to transform Catholicism. Their job was to look after their land, their coffers, and their clergy, support the wars against Protestants, and dazzle Europe's Catholic peasants with earthly displays of the heavenly pomp awaiting them once the misery of their indentured lives was past. The Church lost the last of its Papal States in 1870, with the Risorgimento, and, after years of wrangling with the capricious new entity called Italy, it settled into a fairly comfortable role. It delivered the Catholic vote to the Christian Democrats and kept the Communists at bay, and in return was assured that no unseemly new laws would disturb the patriarchal sanctity of the Catholic family. (It eventually lost on contraception and divorce.)

The received wisdom has been that the Roman Catholic Church as we know it today was born—or reborn—in 1962, with the opening ceremonies of the ecumenical council known to the world as Vatican II. The presiding Pope was the irresistibly benign Angelo Roncalli, or John XXIII, and, in calling that council, he had managed to crack a stifling papal mold, both in the huge pleasure he took in bringing together three thousand bishops from around the world and in the promise he made of opening the Church not only to the different voices of Catholicism but to the voices of the other great religions. "What do we intend?" he said, flinging open a Vatican window. "We intend to let in a little fresh air."

The council sat for three years, and while John XXIII died less than a year into its four sessions, one of the key documents it produced—*Nostra Aetate*, or "In Our Time"—did revise Catholicism's formal relationship to those religions. John had wanted to leave a strong statement about the Church's history of anti-Semitism, and in *Nostra Aetate* the "spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews"—the roots of Christianity in the Jewishness of Christ, and even the dim possibility of Jewish salvation—was finally acknowledged. *Nostra Aetate* also acknowledged, for the first time in Church history, if not what theologians call "the salvation status" of Islam—put simply, do Muslims go to Heaven?—then at least the humanity of Muhammad's followers. "The Church regards with esteem . . . the Muslims," it said. "They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of Heaven and earth."

It wasn't a lot. "You could say that Islam entered Vatican II through a Jewish door," the historian Alberto Melloni told me. But it held out the possibility of a revolution in relations between two religions that (as John Paul II remarked twenty years later, on a trip to Morocco) had spent more time offending each other than embracing. The assumption, perhaps naïve, was that this was a revolution that Islam would welcome, and a new Curial office, for interfaith dialogue and relations, was opened by the Vatican. At first, it was known simply as the Secretariat for Non-Christians, or Pro Non Christianis. In 1988, it became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Giovanni Montini, the cardinal who became Pope Paul VI a few weeks after John's death, signed off on *Nostra Aetate* in 1965. Ten years later, he withdrew the Church's long-standing objection to the construction of a Grand Mosque for Rome. He did it quietly, mindful, perhaps, of the fact that, for most Italians of his generation, the question of Islam belonged where Dante had left it—in the "schismatics" corner of the Eighth Circle, with Muhammad eternally disembowelled or, in the words of the poet, "rent from the chin to where one breaketh wind." (It should be remembered that John of Damascus, the eighth-century saint and last Father of the Church, considered Islam to be a Christian heresy; today, by strict Catholic definition, any religion that postdates and rejects the divinity of Christ is heretical.)



Paul also left the new interfaith office pretty much to its own devices, thus avoiding the theologically sticky question of who, from the point of view of "dialogue" with a religion without hierarchies, could properly be said to speak authoritatively for Islam. This obviously pleased the priests who were off serving small Catholic communities in the Muslim world, but permission to talk about God with imams was not exactly the "fresh air" that liberal lay Catholics had expected from the first ecumenical council in a century. Despite the mythology that surrounds it, Vatican II was meant to open the Church to the world, not to liberalize its doctrine, and its most enduring legacy may have been not *Nostra Aetate* but the conservative backlash that *Nostra Aetate* inspired.

Thomas Michel, the Secretary for Interreligious Affairs at the Jesuit Curia, calls Vatican II "the 1968 of the Catholic Church"—a magical liberating moment that, like '68, frightened as many people as it freed. Conservatives in the Church saw it as a step toward ecumenical license, if not doctrinal collapse. Paul himself seems to have thought so. Within three years of the council's closing session, he produced the encyclical letters *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, which affirmed the doctrine of clerical celibacy, and *Humanae Vitae*, which, despite the best efforts of the theologians on his papal commission on birth control, who after three years of scrutinizing the Gospels had tried to persuade him that contraception was morally acceptable, affirmed its sinfulness. It may prove that, in the end, the ecumenical council that really transformed the Church was not Vatican II but Vatican I, which sat from 1869 to 1870 and enshrined the doctrine of papal infallibility. The Church that Karol Wojtyla and, after him, Joseph Ratzinger inherited is in some ways as old and as new as that.

Benedict XVI, like John Paul II, had been one of the young theological advisers at Vatican II. He was thirty-five then, a full professor of fundamental theology at the University of Bonn, and on his way to a chair in dogmatics at the University of Tübingen, where he taught with Hans Küng, Germany's premier Catholic theologian. Tübingen's Catholic theologians were famously progressive, closer, in some ways, to Protestant theologians like Karl Barth, in Switzerland, than to their own bishops. Ratzinger, at the time, considered Küng his friend. The upheavals of 1968 changed that. Ratzinger, by his own account, was so repelled by the anarchy around him that he fled Tübingen for the conservative Catholic fiefdom of Regensburg's new theology department—a move I have heard described as "going from Harvard to Idaho State."

He had already written dissertations on Augustine and Bonaventura, and even a book arguing for a decentralized Church. But it was at Regensburg's theology department that he honed his belief that the discourse of Christianity is a fundamentally rational discourse—as the West, grounded in Greek philosophical inquiry, understands reason—and as such not ultimately comprehensible, even for argument's sake, outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. That certainty, drawn from his reading of John's Gospel, of the inextricability of Theos and Logos—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—was the heart of his speech in Regensburg nearly forty years later.

Ratzinger and Wojtyla shared this: an exceptionally narrow view of what constitutes a morally acceptable Christian life. That view is reflected in the daily decisions of bishops who in the past few years have denied the sacraments to pro-choice politicians (St. Louis); refused to allow Muslims to pray at a church that was once a mosque (Córdoba); and denied Catholic burial to an incurably ailing man who, after years of suffering on a respirator, asked to die (Rome). But the resemblance ends there. Ratzinger did not really think that theological dialogue with non-Christians was useful, or meaningful, or even possible. John Paul II did. His papacy, he said, was going to be a peace papacy—a papacy of bridges. Unlike Ratzinger, he was not much concerned about whether a Trinitarian faith with an anthropomorphic God was "comprehensible" to a Muslim whose God is never manifest. He would talk to anyone about God. In twenty-six years as Pope, he made a hundred and two trips abroad, many of them to Muslim countries, and it didn't matter whether the understanding of God was the same from one airport to the next.

"He decided that he wouldn't govern—he would *go*" is how Mario Marazziti, one of the founders of the New Age Catholic movement called the Community of Sant'Egidio, describes those years. "Whereas Benedict governs through the Word." Father Michael Hilbert, a professor of canon law and the dean of faculty at the Gregorian, puts it this way: "For John Paul II, the faith was a given, something to celebrate and proclaim. Ratzinger wants to *explain* it. His question is, Why did the Holy Spirit choose me? What message should I be giving now?" And Marco Tosatti, the Vatican correspondent at *La Stampa* and an admirer of Benedict, says simply, "John Paul was *not* a theologian."

John Paul was not popular with the Church hierarchy. His freewheeling embrace did not include it. "He paid great lip service to the spirit of Vatican II," a priest close to the Curia told me. "But, in fact, wherever he went he sat on the local bishop's chair and said, in effect, '*I* am the bishop of this church.' And one by one he reeled in the theologians, the bishops, the orders, everyone who believed that the celebration of the Word is adults living their faith as adults." He stripped the bishops' conferences of their authority. He suspended the Jesuits' constitution for two years. He raised the reactionary lay order Opus Dei to the status of a "personal prelature"—the only personal prelature in the Church—directly responsible to him. The Old Guard of the Vatican and the priests of the most progressive orders were equally bewildered by John Paul's populism. They complained endlessly, if privately, about his style, which was famously demonstrated on a trip to Paris, in the early eighties, when he raced through a High Mass at Notre-Dame in order to stop at a pilgrimage shrine and chapel on the Rue du Bac, where he kissed the ground and started praying. The same conservative bishops who later applauded his insistence that abstinence, not condoms, was the answer to Africa's AIDS crisis considered the embrace, or "dialogue," that he extended to the world, including the Islamic world, to be, at best, naïve or messianic and, at worst, theologically irresponsible or indifferent.

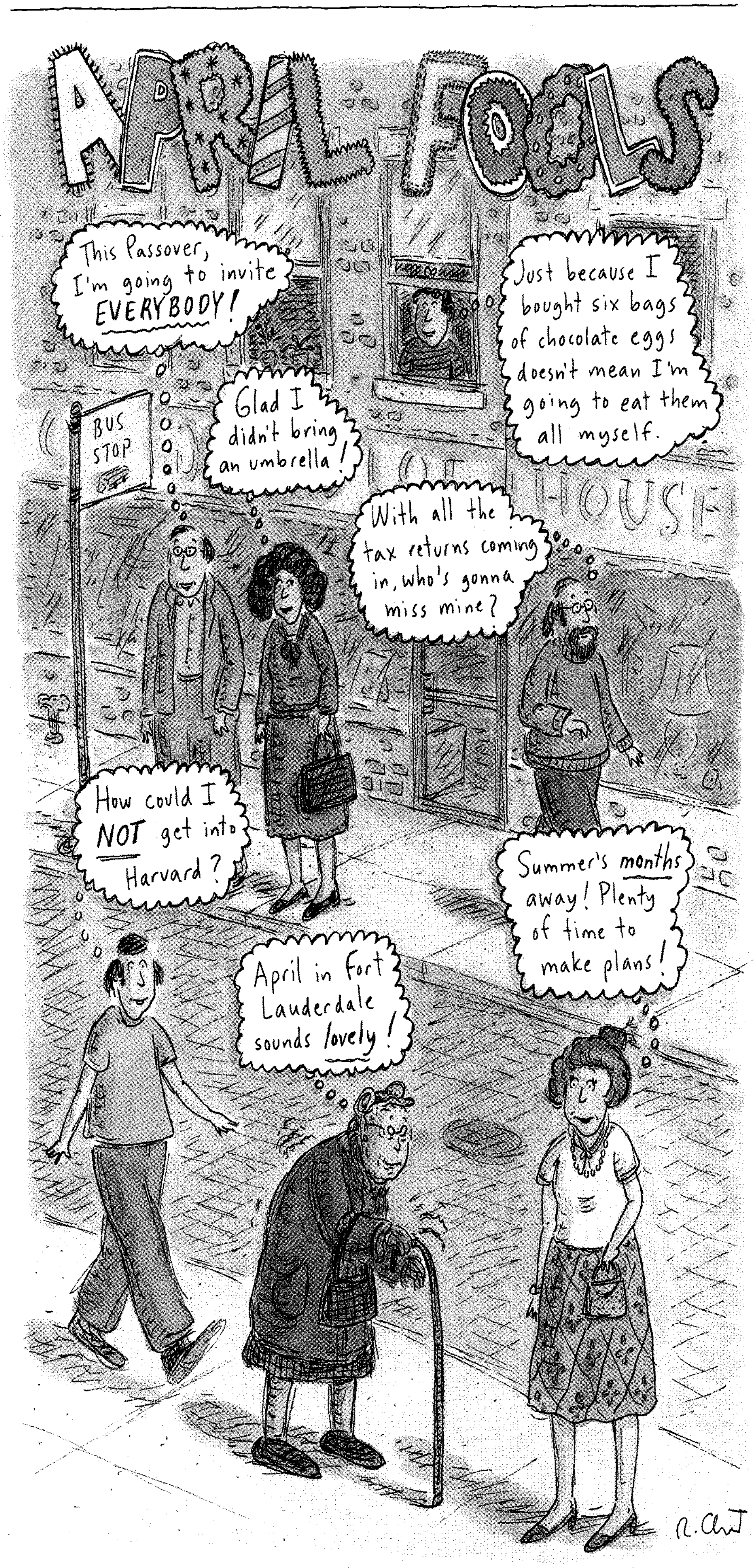
Ratzinger is never theologically indifferent. He deals in truth—in "the Catholic 'om,' " as Robert Mickens, the Vatican correspondent for *The Tablet*, calls it—and has little tolerance for a church of broad, grand gestures. He worries about the illiteracy in the faith. He wants Catholics to be clear and strict about who, precisely, they are. Many people who know Ratzinger call his severity "shyness." Mickens, who was educated by Benedictines, prefers "passive-aggressive." He says, "John Paul II was always making exceptions. Benedict is a Neoplatonist. Everything is 'order.' When he says that homosexuality is a disorder, that divorce and remarriage is a disorder—he can't find any exceptions to 'order.'" (Catholics still argue about the role he played, as Archbishop of Munich and Freising in the late seventies, in the Vatican's decision to strip Hans Küng of the right to teach Catholic theology, on the ground of what could be called Küng's "doctrinal disorder.") He made an exceptionally effective Grand Inquisitor at the Holy Office, censuring outspoken priests and literally silencing the liberation theologians who were reviving the Church in South America. His loyalty, as he saw it, was to Christianity and not to (to his mind) errant Christians.

God's intentions tend to wobble from papacy to papacy, and the Church adjusts to the contradictions. Benedict, for all his doctrinal rigidity, remains extremely forthcoming as a scholar, and he is much more careful than his predecessor to distinguish between opinion and "truth." John Paul II was untroubled by that sort of distinction, and, curiously, Benedict did very little to discourage his conflations of doctrine and what the Church calls "definitive teachings"—perhaps because, during the last years of the Pope's long illness, those teachings were "guided" by Benedict himself. ("Ratzinger has been Pope much longer than you think," Robert Mickens says.) Eventually, John Paul's relations with other religions, especially with Islam, were also guided by Ratzinger, although this was obvious mainly to Rome's *vaticanisti*, who could trace the change.

A case in point is the two big prayer gatherings for peace that took place in Assisi during John Paul's papacy, the first in 1986 and the second in 2002, two and a half years before the Pope died. The first gathering, known today as Assisi I, was a common prayer: a hodgepodge of interfaith holiness convoked by the gurus of the Community of Sant’Egidio, blessed by the Pope, supervised by the head of his Commission for Justice and Peace, the French cardinal Roger Etchegaray, and including among the faithful a Crow medicine man named John Pretty-on-Top, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, the president of Morocco’s High Council of Ulemas, and the Dalai Lama. (John Allen, the Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, said that there were probably more religions represented at Assisi that day than women.) For John Paul, it was an irresistible, ur-ecumenical occasion, with everyone praying together in what was described by a spokesman for Sant’Egidio as “an unconditional opening to the religion of the other.” Justo Lacunza-Balda, a Spanish brother who until last year ran the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, told me, “The Pope’s reasons for Assisi I were maybe a little fuzzy . . . but he knew that Muslim-Christian relations had become fundamental for peace.”

It was not, however, the sort of occasion that appealed to Cardinal Ratzinger. “This cannot be the model,” he told an Austrian paper. Word came down from the Holy Office to the organizers at Sant’Egidio that Assisi I had been too folkloric and, worse, that it had carried a risk of religious relativism and “syncretism” (which, to be fair, it did). Assisi II was what you might call a highly negotiated outpouring. The Pope was failing, and Ratzinger had already delivered his own position paper on the uniqueness of Catholic salvation. (It said that the situation for non-Catholics was “gravely deficient.”) He called it *Dominus Iesus*, and it was a triumphalist document—not, in any event, an “unconditional opening” of the gates of the Vatican, let alone the gates of Heaven. “We sort of reinvented Assisi after that,” Mario Marazziti, from Sant’Egidio, told me. “The religions would pray one beside the other. Not together but *beside*.” This time, John Paul II was installed on a big throne, surrounded by other Catholics, and the religions prayed alone.

Many of the people who found themselves praying beside but not together with the Pope at Assisi II that day—January 24, 2002—were distressed by the

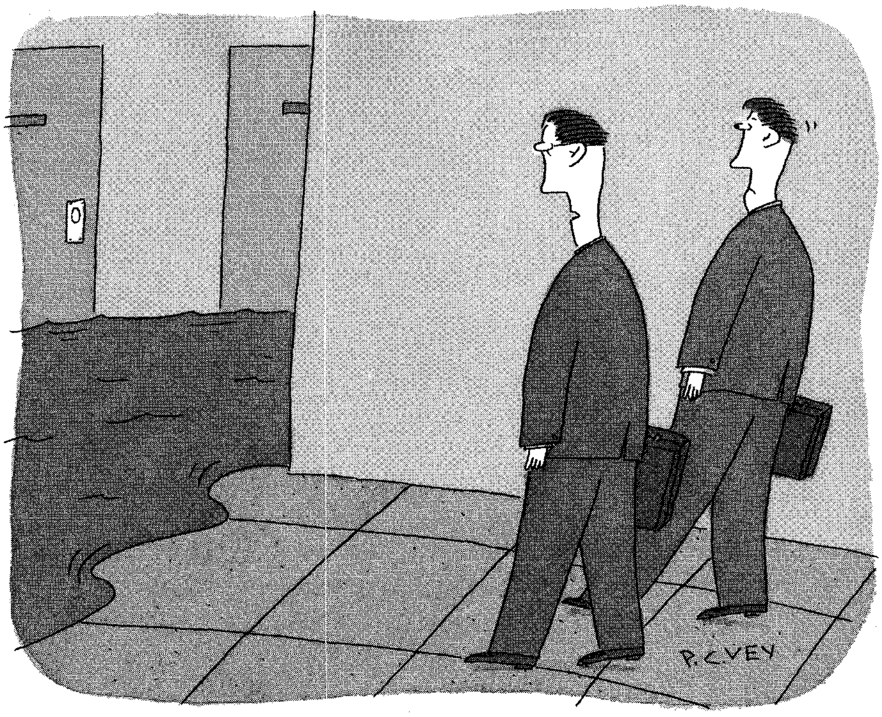

APRIL FOOLS
This Passover, I'm going to invite EVERYBODY!
Just because I bought six bags of chocolate eggs doesn't mean I'm going to eat them all myself.
BUS STOP
Glad I didn't bring an umbrella!
HOUSE
With all the tax returns coming in, who's gonna miss mine?
How could I NOT get into Harvard?
Summer's months away! Plenty of time to make plans!
April in Fort Lauderdale sounds lovely!

change, though only four months after the attack on the World Trade Center there wasn't much faith left in Assisi in the power of prayer for peace. Alberto Melloni says that there was certainly "consciousness in the Curia, after 9/11, of the possible uselessness of such an event." By the eve of his election, in the spring of 2005, Ratzinger was warning Catholics about the "waves" battering at the boat of the true faith, including among them mysticism, "sects," and Turkish Muslims in Christian Europe.

In February last year, ten months into his papacy, Benedict removed the much admired British archbishop who presided over the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and dispatched him to Cairo as a papal nuncio. The archbishop, Michael Fitzgerald, had a particularly warm interest in Islam, and the Vatican called this a key appointment to the Arab League. But it amounted to exile. The council itself was turned over to a conservative cardinal named Paul Poupard, and, to some extent, folded into the Pontifical Council for Culture, which Poupard heads. In today's Vatican, "cultural dialogue" is a code for relations with religions that, by Benedict's definition, cannot sustain a theological relationship with Catholicism. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the idea of cultural dialogue. It can mean that you start focussing on very concrete problems, and even try to resolve those problems. (Lacunza-Balda says that the Pope, if anyone, has the right to challenge Muslims to reflect on "their use of God as an umbrella to cover violence.") On the other hand, it can mean that, in shutting the last theological windows of Vatican II, you are dismissing Islam as one more "gravely deficient" sect.

There are more than twenty Muslim ambassadors to the Holy See, although there is no official ambassador representing "Islam." (The only religion with a permanent delegation to the Vatican is the Church of England.) Some of those ambassadors say Benedict is right, when it comes to the limits of conversation. Muhammad Javad Faridzadeh, the Iranian Ambassador, told me, "After Vatican II, the 'dialogue' was obligatory, it was written, and John Paul *had* to have it. The difference today is not in the obligation but in the way of having it. Theological dialogue between religions is no sooner born than it dies. Theological language is not Socratic. It becomes militant, it is the arm with which you defend your religion. You do not come to a friend to talk bearing arms. You leave theology at the door and come with flowers—which can be 'culture.'"

Faridzadeh is a philosopher—a Platonist, he says, like the Pope. He has studied not only Islamic philosophy but also phenomenology, Continental philosophy, and medieval scholasticism. He reads Kant and Nietzsche and Heidegger and is given to quoting Hans Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Michel Foucault. It is as a philosopher, he says, that he doubts whether a Christian could "defend" the relation of Theos and Logos to a Muslim, who has no image of God, any better than a Muslim could defend Islam to a Christian, who does. Many Catholics with an intimate understanding of Islam share this doubt. Priests who have worked in orthodox Muslim countries like to point out that "dialogue" with fundamentalists is, almost by definition, impossible. James Puglisi, a Franciscan friar who runs the Center for Christian Unity, in Rome, told me, "You need competence on both sides. And it's not just Islam. I was in an 'official conversation' with some Seventh-day Adventists. I said to them, 'We need to write our common history.' But how do you do that, when they don't even accept the critical interpretation of our common texts?"



"Let's not panic till we know whether it's coming in or going out."

Monsignor Khaled Akasheh, a Jordanian diocesan priest who worked with Michael Fitzgerald at the Council for Interreligious Dialogue—and who remains one of the council's leading Islamic experts—said that, to his mind, the best argument for the Pope's campaign to concentrate on Christian identity, rather than on theological incursions into other people's faiths, is that, "with a weak identity, you are unqualified for any kind of 'interreligious' dialogue . . . especially in the face of a strong and sometimes radical Islam." He told me, "Knowing who you are, as a Christian, can be a preparation for dialogue, not a confrontation."

Benedict, who is nearly eighty, is said to have set himself two goals for what he knows will be a short papacy. Neither of them involves Islam theologically, but they do involve it in very practical, political ways. His first goal is ecumenical. It has to do with reinvigorating, and perhaps enforcing, what he sees as Christianity's nonnegotiable moral precepts. In other words, he wants to temper and constrain Western secularism with his own brand of Christian morality; he wants the leaders of other Christian fellowships to join him; and he wants to put the world on notice that, with more than fifteen million Muslims living in Western Europe, the only analogous mission in the West today is an Islamist one.

Moral unity doesn't sound like a lot to ask of Christians, but it is. For one thing, Anglicans and Protestants and Orthodox Christians are hardly eager to take their moral marching orders from a man who holds Catholicism to be the one true articulation of Christian faith—and who is demonstrably more at home discussing moral imperatives with secular intellectuals like Habermas than he is with any of them. It is a matter of theological status. R. William Franklin, an Episcopal priest and a fellow of the Anglican Center in Rome, says that, from an ecumenical standpoint, "we make intellectual but little practical progress on questions of authority, and of course on the 'sticking points.'" (He means the role of women and homosexuals in the two churches—subjects on which this Pope sometimes seems to have more in common with Qom than with Canterbury.) Franklin says that, given the goal of "real and full communion, the best possible scenario would be for the Vatican to say, 'Get your best theologians together and we'll duke it out.'" But, for Benedict, the Anglican schism remains, if not a heresy, an unacceptable rejection.

Of course, the Pope's real interest is in numbers, and apart from the various Pentecostal and evangelical sects, with whom he does not do serious ecumenical business, the big numbers for his Christian moral crusade lie in some sort of reconciliation between the Eastern and the Western Churches. This has been a papal imperative since the Eastern Church broke with Rome, in the eleventh century, and it is especially important now, with Orthodox Christians being the first line of defense against radical Islam. Benedict's visit to Turkey, in late November—two and a half months after his Regensburg speech—was originally intended to be the public face of the Vatican's private negotiations with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who, from his seat in Istanbul, remains the titular head of an Orthodox communion of three hundred million people. The trip had been in the works since 2004—which is to say that it was going to be John Paul's visit, and it was going to be pleasant. Turkey not only was a friend to the West—the prototype of George W. Bush's friendly Muslim state—but officially considered itself the West, and was still confident of a European welcome. That welcome has pretty much been withdrawn by the European Union. And, because of it, Turkey's handful of Christians—not much more than a hundred thousand in a country of seventy million people—feel particularly abandoned. (The Ottoman massacre of more than a million Armenian Christians, early in the last century, is for them a living nightmare.)

Turkey, by constitution and military oversight, remains Atatürk's secular state. There are no laws limiting Christian practice, but the particularly volatile new mixture of Islamic internationalism and Turkish nationalism could make the country a very uncomfortable place for Christians practicing their faith outside the big, cosmopolitan cities, like Istanbul and Izmir. "The Pope now sees this visit as a moment to contribute to their serenity," Father Lombardi, Benedict's press secretary, told me the day before they flew to Ankara. Cardinal Etchegaray, who joined Lombardi and Benedict on the papal plane (on what was Etchegaray's first trip to the Muslim world since John Paul sent him on a "peace mission" to Saddam Hussein, in 2003), explained it this way: "Don't forget, the primary reason for this Turkish visit is ecumenical. We have had enormous difficulties with this trip, but we are going for this reason."

It was classic Vatican understatement, given that Turkish nationalists had been rioting to prevent it; the Army was virtually occupying Istanbul to keep them from rioting again; and the country's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was fleeing to a NATO meeting in Latvia—and only at the last minute announced that he might have time for the Pope at the Ankara airport just before his flight. (He had twenty minutes.) Not even the Patriarchy was altogether happy about Benedict's impending visit. The Orthodox Church had been counting on Turkish membership in Europe as a kind of protection, and Benedict's earlier statements about Turkey being "in permanent contrast to Europe," along with the local fury over Regensburg, had left all Christians in the East vulnerable. As it happened, the trip went peacefully, and by all accounts it was successful. Benedict made his spiritually fraternal gestures. He held hands and prayed—beside but not together—with the Grand Mufti of Istanbul in the Blue Mosque. No one seemed offended by his obvious unease, perhaps because most Turks, Muslim and Christian, were just as anxious. "We are *praying* for this blessing to be over," an Orthodox friend I phoned in Istanbul that day said.

Benedict's second goal is reciprocity with Islam. He wants to use his papacy to restore to Christian minorities in Muslim countries the same freedom of religion that most Muslims enjoy in the West. The question of reciprocity is hardly new, but it was never a priority at the Vatican before Benedict's reign. John Paul II avoided it, on his travels, by saying, in effect, "I go for the country, not the religion." Benedict has pretty much made it a precondition for relations between the Vatican and the Muslim world. He clearly thinks that the Judeo-Christian West has been self-destructively shortsighted in its concessions to the Islamic diaspora, when few, if any, concessions are made to Christians and Jews in most of the Middle East.

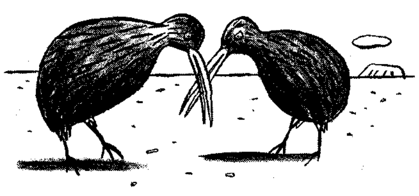
In countries under Islamic law, conversion to Christianity (or any other religion) is an apostatic crime. In Saudi Arabia, churches are forbidden. In the marginally more open sheikhdoms, Christian practice is strictly controlled. In Iran, where Christians and Jews are officially tolerated as "people of the Book," the President not only denies the Holocaust but wants Israel "wiped off the map." In Iraq, as many as half the country's Christians have fled in the past three years—because of the war, but also because of the religious hatred that the war has unleashed. It is hard to imagine any of those Muslim states being so eager to please a Catholic Pope that they would bow to the sensitivities of Christians or Jews the way the West bowed to Muslim sensitivities when the Tate Britain removed a sculpture involving a tattered Koran from an exhibition; or the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten* apologized for twelve cartoon drawings of the Prophet; or the Deutsche Oper stopped production of an "Idomeneo," because of a scene in which the severed heads of Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, and Poseidon were set on chairs. (The opera was eventually performed, though it has to be said that the Pope agrees with Islam when it's a question of art versus God.)

But it may be that the price of reciprocity with militant Islam is unacceptable, given that it now seems to involve a demand that Christians recast Islam's jihadist past and its particularly bloody present into something spiritually savory. Sheikh Mahmoud Ashour, of the Islamic institute at Cairo's Al-Azhar University, spoke for many of his colleagues when he said, after Regensburg, "Islam is innocent of everything mentioned by this Pope. . . . He is the only one adding fuel to the fire of hatred and division among the religions." He threatened to "boycott the Vatican" and added that "stopping the interfaith dialogue is the least that can be done." In Europe, the Islamist threats are far more serious, and certainly more inclusive; the fatwas arrive by e-mail, and the police count among their everyday duties the job of guarding people, most of them Muslims, on jihadist hit lists. Justo Lacunza-Balda, the former head of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, told me that the Pope had every reason to say to Islam, "Excuse me, we are not the same."

For some Catholic theologians, the issue isn't Benedict's idea of Islam, or his notion of a purer Church, or his dismissal of the possibility that doctrine can evolve. It is his conviction that Christian faith is demonstrably "rational." That was the argument of his Regensburg speech, and, much more impressively stated, of his long dialogue with Habermas about reason, religion, and the "dialectics of secularization." Habermas has always maintained that secular morality—morality negotiated in and by civil society—can, and should, provide humanity with a governing ethos. Benedict, in the course of their conversation, maintained that "the rational or ethical or religious formula that would embrace the whole world and unite all persons does not exist; or, at least, it is unattainable at the present moment." By that definition, almost any dialogue that does not include a shared definition of the rational, the ethical, or the religious becomes impossible. And it precludes any attempt at theological dialogue with Islam.

It is worth remembering that Manuel II Paleologus, the Byzantine emperor who got the Pope into so much trouble in Regensburg, was having a theological dialogue with his Muslim guest—or thought he was. That dialogue went on for the better part of a long winter, in the middle of a war, and the Emperor enjoyed it enough to fill two volumes trying to preserve it. At the time, Orthodox Christians like Paleologus had almost as much to fear from Catholic armies as from Muslim ones; and his Persian friend had certainly as much to fear from Ottomans as from Christians. Some clerics believe that Benedict's unexamined reference to the words of an obscure emperor under siege in the fourteenth century was, in fact, less an attack on Islam than a kind of coded message to those Orthodox Christians, a misguided step on his ecumenical mission, a way of saying, in effect, Let's stop arguing with each other—we have a new enemy now. Feisal Abdul Rauf, a well-known Egyptian Sufi imam who sits on the board of New York's Islamic Center and leads an interfaith initiative "to heal the relations between the Islamic world and America," told me, "I read that speech, and reread it, and it was not very philosophically coherent. So I asked myself what it *was*. . . . The real enemy, for the Pope, isn't Islam. It's the secular West. He sees that, in the West, religion is banished from the boardroom of society—that it has no place at the table in the public debate on how to build 'the good society, the *ideal* society.' And he sees that in Islam religion is not only at the table; it's in some ways at the head of the table. He's jealous."

Rauf was one of the few Muslim leaders who appealed for calm and tolerance after the Regensburg speech. Some moderate Muslims who publicly addressed the Pope were more concerned with refuting his argument than with condemning the violence it inspired. Thirty-eight Muslim theologians from around the world produced an open letter praising Benedict's "efforts to oppose the dominance of positivism and materialism in human life" but respectfully pointing out "some errors in the way you mentioned Islam" (his understanding of compulsion in Islam, for one, and of transcendence, and jihad, and conversion) and even the errors of an eleventh-century Muslim scholar he had cited as his expert. A few wrote to remind him that, as far as "reason" was concerned, it was Arab rationalists like Avicenna and Averroës who, with their commentaries on Aristotle, had saved Greek thought from obliteration during Europe's undeniably dark Dark Ages. Most mentioned that they missed the ecumenical embrace of John Paul II.



The Pope, in his way, apologized: he announced that he was "deeply sorry" that anything he said had upset Muslims, though not that he was sorry to have said it. In the course of the next weeks, the Vatican Web site doctored a few phrases of the Regensburg speech. A short footnote was added, saying that the Pope did not agree with the Emperor's "things only evil and inhuman" vision of Islam. He met with the Muslim ambassadors to the Holy See, hoping to appease the rulers they represented. His biggest success was with the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who sent his "respect" to Benedict and noted his satisfaction in seeing that he had "modified the remarks."

St. Paul was born in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. He was a Roman citizen—a Jew with an education—and he knew Greek. It has been said that if John the Evangelist put the Word into Christianity, Paul put Greece into our understanding of John. People have been arguing about the meaning of the Word for nearly two thousand years—it is one of the beautiful mysteries of Christianity. But as the Catholic Encyclopedia said, in 1910, in its chapter on Logos, "Hellenic speculations constitute a dangerous temptation for Christian writers"—even when the writer happens to be Pope. Christianity, like any faith, changes with the language that describes it.

The Muslim anthropologist Talal Asad puts it this way: "Theology, being *in* language, is part of culture"—which is to say that, if "culture" is open to discussion, so is God. Asad's mother was a Saudi. His father was an Austrian Jewish convert to Islam—a journalist who wrote one of the great English translations of the Koran. Asad himself grew up in India, studied in England, teaches in New York, and is married to an Englishwoman. It isn't surprising that he finds Benedict's distinction between theological and cultural dialogue bewildering. He told me, "This notion of 'theological dialogue' is a very modern, liberal idea in some ways. But they had it in Spain once, where there was as much of a mix of different religious cultures as human beings seem to be capable of. And today—take the idea, in Islamic tradition, of the 'inconceivable and unrepresentable God.' I would assume each side would be interested in investigating that further, in talking about it more. To say no to that is simply not very interesting intellectually."

Daniel Madigan, who is leaving the Gregorian this year to teach at Georgetown, says his colleagues are worried about the pressure that the Council for Interreligious Dialogue is under now to restrict itself to "political, cultural, and human-rights issues," with no theological component to the discussion. He thinks they are right to worry. But he also says that there is no way, really, to monitor, let alone separate, theological and cultural exchange. "The idea that social and cultural dialogue won't be theological—it's not really true," he told me. "You can't separate religious ethics from the concrete ethical decisions that people make. Interreligious dialogue has been going on since Vatican II, but that doesn't mean that under John Paul II people were just sitting around discussing the nature of the Holy Trinity. At the Gregorian, the idea has been to train people to work in interreligious dialogue. We teach the theory and fundamentals of the anthropology and sociology of religions: how each religion—Islam, say—sees itself. But interreligious dialogue, theological dialogue—we have it every day. We struggle with our texts in each other's presence."

And Khaled Akasheh, at the Council for Interreligious Dialogue, told me, "The Pope's message is that there will be more attention to the cultural dimension of theological dialogue—well, every religion is born in culture. That's fine. But the very important point for me is that the dialogues we have take place through local churches and mosques all over the world. The council exists to encourage these dialogues, and, whatever its criteria, they were never about universals." The larger problem, of course, is not friendly Christian and Muslim clergymen talking about God. It is radical Islam, which has nothing to say to Christians beyond, at best, invective and, at worst, threats. Marco Tosatti, at *La Stampa*, told me, "The big meetings have been organized by the Christians, not by the Muslims. I'm wondering more and more if most Muslims are even interested." Maybe. But it would seem that today, for moderate Muslims, the argument for embrace is particularly strong. They are as much at risk, in radically Islamist countries, as Christians are. They are frightened and isolated, and if there is no dialogue with the Church they will be more isolated. The idea of interreligious dialogue may have no meaning for fundamentalists, but it does for most Muslims—waiting, in some alarm, for the jihad to pass.

"For years after Vietnam, I woke up screaming about the cold weather in Toronto."

Muslim believers do not separate "real life" and religious life (and neither, for that matter, do most Christians). Priests with experience of Islam know this, and so do the many Catholic intellectuals who say that the trouble with the Pope's "no" to theological dialogue isn't simply its dismissal of Islam; it is what that dismissal says about Christianity. The certainty that Greek philosophy is part and root of Christianity—one Muslim philosopher called it God having "a Greek friend"—seems almost diminishing to those Catholics. "We have to remember that Jesus wasn't Greek," Daniel Madigan says. "John was a Jewish document, not a Greek one." Thomas Michel says, "Asian Catholics say, 'We're Catholics, but we're not Greek.'" And Robert Mickens says, "Ratzinger is Eurocentric. To him, Europe means Christianity." It may be that in reducing Islam to a "culture," an artifact of its time and place and circumstances, Benedict ends up reducing Christianity to a culture, too. Alberto Melloni, the historian, thinks that the Pope's idea that "there is nothing of me in the other and nothing of the other in me" doesn't even do justice to the idea of culture—Talal Asad would certainly agree with that—let alone to Christianity. Melloni told me, "The fact remains that Catholicism exists within other cultures. Take Arab Catholics. They can be as militant about Israel as any other Arabs, and this has to open some very deep questions for Benedict. . . . Talking about culture as the bottom line of religious dialogue brings the question of culture within the Church. It's a contradiction."

Marco Politi put it this way: "There's not just the Greek Logos in Christianity. There's been violence and irrationality and literalism. O.K., that may be what Islam is in this century. But for centuries it was us." ♦

FICTION

TEACHING

BY RODDY DOYLE

You know my mother.

The girl stood beside his desk. She was one of those big-eyed kids. She'd always look a bit like a kid. By the time she was thirty-five, she'd be a strange-looking kid.

—You know my mother, she said again.

Now, though, she was one of those lovely kids. She'd stopped, hesitated, on her way past his desk to the door. The last out. She'd probably made sure of that. It was her first full day in the secondary school.

He finished what he was doing. Searching for a red Biro at the bottom of his bag. And he looked at her.

—Is that right? he said.

—Yeah.

He looked for her mother in the kid's face.

Big eyes. He stopped looking. He could feel the sweat on his forehead.

—Who is she? he said.

—Amanda Collins, she said.

—Amanda Collins?

—Yeah. Do you remember her?

—I do, yeah.

But he didn't.

—How is she?

—She's grand, said the kid.

—Good.

—She says they all fancied you.

She wasn't the first. The last five or six years, kids had been stopping at his desk. Their first day, their big news. You knew my ma or my da.

This was killing him.

It was getting harder. Getting through the day, the nine class periods. It was the first week in September.

She was still there. He'd have to say something. Silence wouldn't work.

—It's hard to imagine, he said. Isn't it?

—Yeah.

He looked at her. He laughed—relief. He couldn't believe he'd been so stupid. Even as he heard himself say it. Like some seedy old man, flirting or something.

She laughed, too. A lovely kid. Open. Like her mother must have been. Why he'd loved teaching, when he started, and for a long time.

SA SCHLOFF, "CHAIRS" (2005)

He didn't drink in the day. His head was telling him he should, something quick, to swallow the headache. But he didn't. He never had, and he never would. There was no flask or bottle in his bag. No quick dash down to the local. Too many parents, too much self-respect.

He used to like it, kids stopping for a chat. *What groups are you into, sir? Our cat's after having kittens. D'you want one, sir?* Things like that. He used to write down the best of them.

It didn't really happen now. Kids didn't stop. He wrote down nothing.

The kid here was going.

—See you tomorrow, sir.

He looked at his timetable. It was open, on his desk.

—Yes, he said. Tomorrow. Bye.

—Bye.

She left the door open. A lovely kid. He'd smile every time she walked in, for the next six years.

He went to the door. He used to stand there between classes and watch the world go by. All those tall and tiny children. More than a thousand of them on the move. He could have named most of them. He shut the door.

Things changed. It wasn't just him. He wasn't denying anything: his heart wasn't in it. He wished he was somewhere else. But there weren't as many students now; the area outside was changing. The corridor wasn't as packed as it had been when he'd started, twenty-three years before.

He looked again at the timetable. He sat down. He had to bring the page closer to his eyes. He didn't have a class now; he was free till eleven o'clock.

It wasn't just him. Something had happened. A kid stopping at the desk, a boy or a girl, had become something to be wary of, almost to dread. They'd been given talks, in the staff room, on the telltale signs—the eyes, marks, cuts. He was probably the only member of the staff left who hadn't been told an abuse story. He'd expected it to happen. For a long time. He'd felt left out when it didn't. He'd even been ready to make up something, when a gang of the teachers had gone for an impromptu pint after work. The urge to tell, to get back his status as one of the nice teachers. But he'd been wise; he'd kept his mouth shut.

He looked at the timetable again. He had two classes left to lunchtime, and another two after. That wasn't too bad. He looked at his watch. The headache was starting to lift. He'd be better in the next class; he'd get up and move around. He'd be Robin Williams for half an hour, in "Dead Poets Society." One of those "Seize the day" classes. The way he used to be, all day. He'd even said it once. *Seize the day, boys and girls.* They'd cheered.

He had an abuse story of his own. He'd been in first year, like the big-eyed kid who'd just left. A few months in the new school, he knew hardly anyone. He'd been sent to the Christian Brothers and he still hadn't got used to them. They were strange men, sometimes funny, but savage and unpredictable. The lay teachers were as bad. If he listened, he could hear shouting or crying, someone being hit, in another part of the building. The noises were always hanging there. Once, he remembered, a boy in the room next door was thrown against the classroom wall, and he watched the blackboard on his side of the wall come off its hinges and fall to the wooden floor. They'd laughed. They'd all laughed. They'd laughed at everything.

There was one of the brothers, Brother Flynn. Latin and Civics. He'd stand at the front of the room and smile and rub his big hands. But he could just as easily bring the hands down on someone's face, one onto each ear. The front desk was a death sentence. But, really, Flynn was all right. He was the only teacher who used their first names. He didn't go mad when he saw the names of English football teams on the covers of their books and copies. Flynn was a laugh.

But Flynn liked him. He'd smile at him when he was testing their Latin vocabulary. The others noticed.

—Smile back and he won't give us any homework.

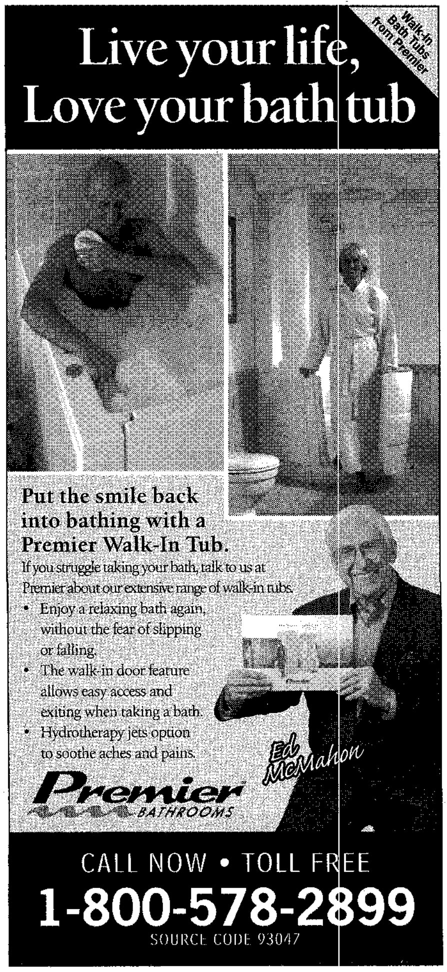
—Lay off.

—Go on, yeh queer.

—Fuck off.

Flynn patted his shoulder one day as he was going past. He wanted to cry. He wanted to get out the window, drop to the ground, run into the sea across the road. He knew the others were looking. He knew they'd be waiting to get him when the bell went and Flynn left the room. He hated Flynn and he needed him to stay.

It had only lasted for a while. He got to know a few of the other lads. They went on the same bus home; he made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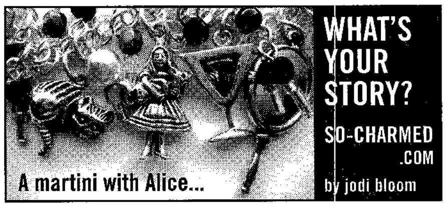
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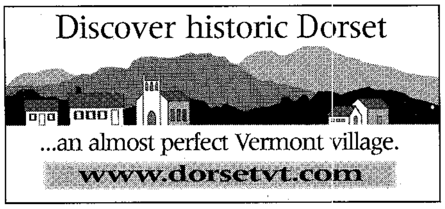
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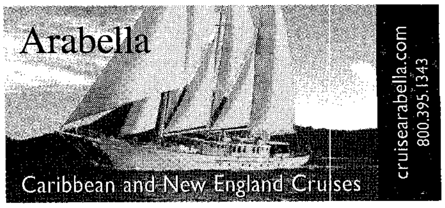
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them laugh. They knew he was sound, and soon the stuff about Flynn became a joke. He was one of them now, so he wasn't a queer. Flynn still smiled and it didn't matter.

Then he was sick. One morning, he felt hot. His forehead, his whole face, was suddenly wet with sweat. He put his hand up.

—Brother!

He was going to puke. Flynn must have noticed, must have seen the color dropping off his face. He opened the door.

—Quick, quick!

Flynn was standing outside when he came back out of the toilet. He smiled at him. He said he'd drive him home. He told Flynn that his mother wouldn't be there; she went to his granny's on Mondays, two buses across the city.

Flynn took him over to the house where all the brothers lived, beside the school. He'd never been in the house before. He'd never really been near it. It was a rule that never had to be remembered: don't go near the brothers' house. Water dripped from the roof of the porch onto the red and black tiles.

—Mind you don't slip, said Flynn.

He remembered shivering, remembered feeling the cold on his skin.

Flynn opened the front door. He followed him into the hall. The same red and black tiles.

—Shut the door.

He pushed the front door closed. The lock was colossal, a big black box screwed right into the wood.

Flynn kept walking. He stood for a while, then followed him. Flynn's black shoes on the tiles, and his own shoes—they were the only noises. The house was empty. He'd seen the housekeeper once, a woman much older than his mother, walking toward the brothers' house with a net shopping bag full of apples. But she wasn't there now. He could tell: something about the cold—the house had been empty for hours.

Flynn pulled open a door. He disappeared behind it, then came back out, backward. He was dragging something. It was a fold-up bed, on casters. The casters squealed across the tiles. Flynn dragged the bed across the hall, to another door. He stayed where he was. Flynn was still going backward, pulling the bed, looking at him.

—Come on, he said.

He didn't move. He remembered that. He remembered the slow terror, in his legs.

—Come on, said Flynn. Quick now.

He watched, stayed at the door, as Flynn unfolded the bed. He heard him grunt as he pushed the two sides down. It was the dining room, or something. Flynn pushed the bed against the long table.

—There you are. Lie down.

Flynn walked across to the window. He heard him pull the curtains. It didn't make the room much darker. He sat down on the bed. It moved a bit, on the casters. He took off his shoes. He stood up again. He could hear Flynn's feet. He pulled back the gray blanket. The mattress was bare, and striped.

He lay down. He felt the bed move under him again, just a bit, an inch. He pulled the blanket over his chest. The room got darker. Flynn was standing in front of the light coming from the hall.

—How's the tummy now?

—All right, Brother.

—Are you going to be sick again, d'you think?

—No, Brother.

He felt the blanket being pulled away from him, but he couldn't see Flynn's hands. Then he saw Flynn's face, close to his own. He was leaning over him. The blanket was gone. Then it was back; he felt it land on his legs, his waist, his chest. He felt Flynn's hands at his neck. He could feel Flynn's knuckles, on his chin. Flynn was holding the blanket. He was tucking it under his neck. He was looking down at him. He was smiling.

That was it, all he could remember. He half-expected more to open up—the hand grabbing his neck, holding him down—but it never did. He'd told someone about it once, a woman at a party. He'd stopped where his memory stopped, at the man tucking the blanket under the boy's chin. He was sitting beside the woman, two kitchen chairs side by side. She looked at him, then told him that he was an apologist for the Catholic Church. She stood up as she said it.

There was something, color, at the corner of his eye. He glanced over at the classroom door. The principal was looking in the window. She waved, and went. He looked down at his desk. What had she seen? His diary was open, so was one of his books. His timetable. His pen was there as well. It was fine. He was working. He felt his face. He'd shaved that morning.

Not that it mattered. It had never mattered, that kind of idiocy, in this school. How you taught, not how you dressed; that was what mattered. It was one of the things he'd loved about the place. But he'd noticed. His beard had changed color. There was gray in it, even a bit of white. He looked like a wino or something if he didn't shave every second day.

The principal was younger than him. She'd come to the school four years after he had. He'd kissed her once—he cringed now.

He looked at his timetable. It was darker in the room now; it was going to rain. This had been his room for more than twenty years. He knew the light and every noise.

He'd do something about the drinking. He'd give it up. He would—he could. He'd watched a football match the night before, the Champions League, on RTÉ, the whole thing. But he didn't know who'd played. He remembered nothing. Not a thing. He'd have to read the report in the paper before lunch; the paper was in his bag. Then he'd be able to talk about it, if he talked to anyone. But he'd probably stay in the room. Plan his classes.

He'd stop. The drinking. He wasn't fooling himself. He knew it was serious.

He'd kissed her. That first year she'd been in the school. After a union meeting.

He smiled. The absurdity. The idea of kissing her now. He looked at the window. There was no one there. He looked at the timetable. Sixth-Year English was next. A double class, Ordinary level. There were no Honors classes on his timetable. It was five years since he'd had an Honors class. Nothing had been said.

These kids were fine. He'd had them last year. But there was no life in them. He'd have sworn it was true. It just wasn't like it used to be.

He wrote in his diary, "NOVEL." He'd do the novel with them, a good start to the year. What novel was it? Had they done it already, last year? He looked at his shelf. He knew all the books, the shapes, the colors of the spines; he didn't have to read the titles. Which one was it?

He'd do something else with them. He'd think of something. He was good at that. *Seize the day*. The spontaneity. Not with this gang, though. Those days were over. He'd have to have something ready.

He stood up. His knee cracked. Something dry in the joint. He went to the bookshelf.

That was something he definitely remembered, the first time he'd heard his knee crack. It was the last time he'd been with a woman, and sober enough to remember it.

—What was that?!

She'd thought it was an animal or something, under the bed. Gnawing a bone. She'd made him turn on the light. A disaster, the two of them. Squinting—reality. He got off the bed and heard the crack again.

—My knee, he said.

—What?

—The noise, he said. Listen.

He moved again. She heard the crack. She started crying. A disaster.

He still liked the teaching. He hadn't changed that much. He liked the new kids who were beginning to turn up every year, the sons and daughters of the immigrants. Black kids with Dublin accents. And the East Europeans. Lovely kids. And it reminded him—now, he could feel it—of why he'd loved teaching. Empowerment. He'd loved that word. He'd believed it. Giving power to working-class kids. He could get worked up about poverty, and why he was there in the school. A word like "underclass" could still get him going, the convenience and cynicism of it. Hiding all that social injustice and inequality in a word like that. The working class became the underclass, and their problems became inevitable. His thinking hadn't changed. When he thought.

He looked at his watch. He had twenty minutes left. There was a tiny crack in the glass, and a line of mist at the crack, under the glass. He'd no idea when that had happened.

There'd been one woman. She'd said it once: she loved the way he thought.

He had an address in his wallet. A.A. The address and the times. Alco-

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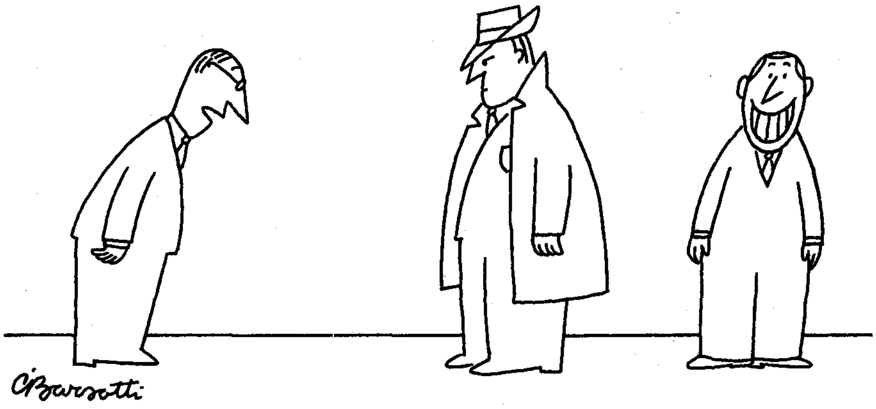

"By Ned, you're right, inspector—the body has been moved."

holics Anonymous. It was in his jacket, in the inside pocket, ready for whenever he wanted it. Someone had given it to him. A cousin of his. At his uncle's funeral, at the few drinks after the burial. He didn't get it at first; he didn't know what she was doing. He thought she was slipping him her phone number and he was running through the ethics and legality of it, phoning his own cousin, arranging to meet for a date—because she wasn't a bad-looking woman and, really, he hardly knew her. He hadn't met her since they were kids. But it hadn't been her number at all. It was an address for Alcoholics Anonymous, and the meeting times. He'd thought about going, to see if she'd be there. But he hadn't gone. He hadn't wanted to; he hadn't felt the need. Still, he'd held on to the address. He knew it was there.

He looked at his watch. He had thirteen minutes, plenty of time. He'd give them the opening sentence of a story, and get them to continue. That always worked. He'd give them a good one.

He'd come close once, with a woman. Mary. They'd been together for two years. He'd just graduated, started teaching. She was still in her final year. She'd be finished in August, and he knew what would happen then. She'd get a teaching job like his. Their salaries would meet and they'd buy a house and get married. Because her mother would deliver the Great Silence until they did. They laughed about it, the Great Silence, her name for the mother's war against any urges or opinions that might deflect her children from their proper course: the career, the four-bedroom house, the husband or wife, the happiness that was Southside, Catholic respectability. They laughed but they'd known: the old bitch would win. They'd never admit it, the choices would be theirs—but they'd do it. They'd get the mortgage; it was mad to carry on renting. They'd get married; for tax reasons. In a church; for the laugh. They'd known—*he'd* known. And he'd done the right thing. He sat beside her and told her it was over. He remembered the elation as he left her in the pub and went back to their flat, to pack. Throwing everything into two bags. Going. There'd been a few phone calls, then that was it. He was alone. He could live.

One night, a few years ago, he'd been watching a current-affairs program on RTÉ, after the news. He was only half-watching, and reading. He looked up at the screen. He recognized her before he knew her name. Mary. She was in some city in Africa and she was talking to people—children and women—who'd been deported from Ireland, interviewing them. In small, dark rooms, or rooms that seemed to be missing walls, that were sliding onto the street.

He watched. She stood on a street that looked like the scene of recent violence and spoke to the camera. There were two men with rifles just behind her. She looked well. She looked great. The report ended.

He had seven minutes. *Seize the day, boys and girls.* Teaching was a branch of show business. He'd always said it. Grab the kids and bring them with you. Empowerment. He stood at the board. He waited for the idea, the opening sentence that they'd read on their way into the room, the sentence that would have them grabbing their pens and folders from their bags. He hadn't eaten in days; he wasn't hungry. But he thought that food, anything, might help with the headache.

But, there was his idea. He wrote it on the board. "He hadn't eaten in days." He looked at it.

Six minutes.

He sat down. He was pleased. He was sorted, organized, up to lunchtime. Only nine more months to go. He made himself smile. He was back on track. He opened his diary again, put it beside his timetable. He'd plan ahead. He'd memorize the students' names. He'd smile at them when they came into the room. He'd chat to them. He'd bring them with him. Empowerment. It was still there; he could feel it, across his chest. He wouldn't drink today; he'd go straight home. He'd get food on the way. He'd get some new clothes at the weekend. He'd go to a film or a play.

That big-eyed kid, the one who'd told him that he'd known her mother. He wished that kid was his. It was ridiculous—the thought just rolled through him. Brother Flynn—the man's smile, looking down at him. He wanted to look at someone that way, to smile down at his own child. To be able to do that. Whatever it took, whatever he gave up or didn't give up.

It was ridiculous.

He stood up. He opened the door. He was ready for the bell. He looked at the board. "He hadn't eaten in days." They'd love that. Kidnapping, starvation; the boys would love it. But he had another idea. He went back to the board and picked up the chalk. He wrote under the first sentence, "She hadn't eaten in days." That was even better. They could have the choice. He could feel it in him. It was the old feeling, back. The hands would be up, asking him how to spell "anorexia." He could already feel the buzz, the energy. He'd stay standing, walk among them. He'd smile. He'd laugh.

He looked at his watch.

One minute.

He was fine. ♦

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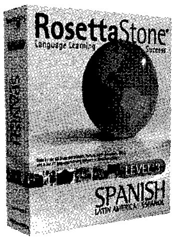

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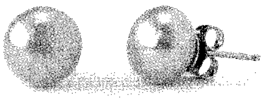

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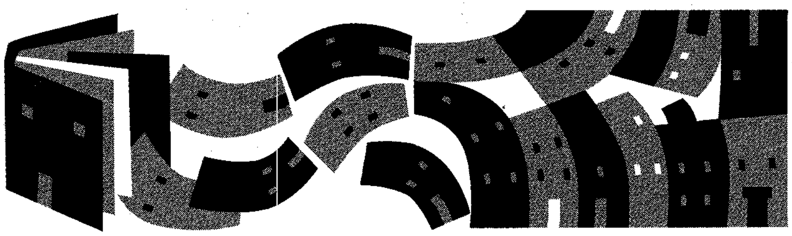

BOOKS

THE VALIANT SWABIAN

A new biography of Albert Einstein.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

When youthful and frisky, Albert Einstein would refer to himself as “the valiant Swabian,” quoting the poem by Ludwig Uhland: “But the valiant Swabian is not afraid.” Albert—the name Abraham had been considered by his unreligious parents but was rejected as “too Jewish”—was born in Ulm, in March of 1879, not long after Swabia joined the new German Reich; he was the first child and only son of a mathematics-minded but financially inept father and a strong-willed, musically gifted woman of some inherited means. A daughter, Maria, was born to the couple two and a half years later; when shown his infant sister, Albert took a look and said, “Yes, but where are the wheels?” Though this showed an investigative turn of mind, the boy was slow to talk, and the family maid dubbed him *der Depperte*—“the dopey one.”

As the boy progressed through the schools of Munich, where his father had found employment in his brother Jakob’s gas-and-electrical-supply company, Albert’s teachers, though giving him generally high marks, noted his resistance to authority and Germanic discipline, even in its milder Bavarian form. As early as the age of four or five, while sick in bed, he had had a revelatory encounter with the invisible forces of nature: his father brought him a compass, and, as he later remembered it, he was so excited as he examined it that he trembled and grew cold. The child drew the momentous conclusion that “something deeply hidden had to be behind things.” That intimation was to carry him to some of the greatest scientific discoveries of the twentieth century, and to a subsequent persistent but unsuccessful search for a theory that would unite all the known laws of nature, and to a global fame impossible to imagine befalling any mere intellectual now.

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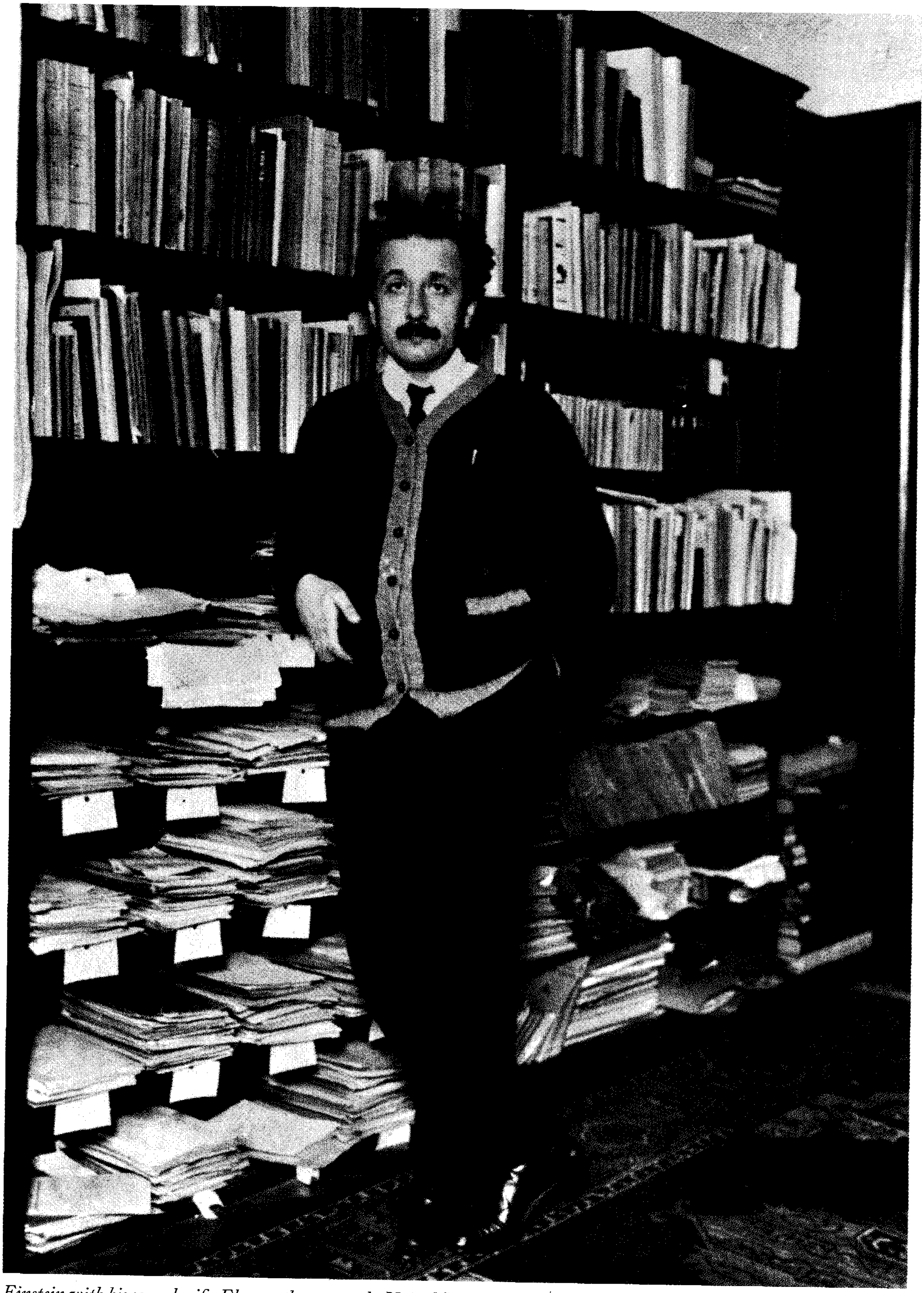
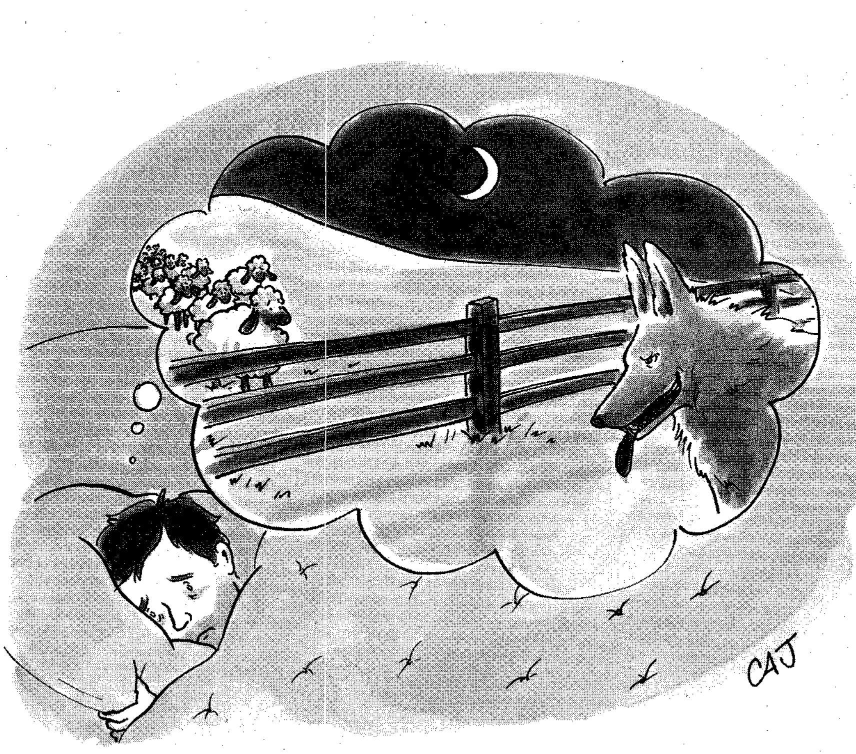
Walter Isaacson’s thorough, comprehensive, affectionate new biography, “Einstein: His Life and Universe” (Simon & Schuster; $32), relates how, in 1931, during the fifty-one-year-old scientist’s second visit to America, he and his second wife, Elsa, attended, in California, a séance at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Upton Sinclair. He must have allowed a little skepticism to creep into his polite conversation, for “Mrs. Sinclair challenged his views on science and spirituality.” His own wife overheard and indignantly intervened, telling their hostess, “You know, my husband has the greatest mind in the world.” Mrs. Sinclair didn’t dispute the assertion, replying, “Yes, I know, but surely he doesn’t know everything.” On the same excursion, Einstein, at his own request, met Charlie Chaplin, who, as they arrived at the première of “City Lights,” said, of the applauding public, “They cheer me because they all understand me, and they cheer you because no one understands you.”

In 1905, Einstein, a twenty-six-year-old patent clerk in Bern, Switzerland, had produced in rapid succession five scientific papers that (a) proposed that light came not just in waves but in indivisible, discrete packets of energy or particles called, after Max Planck’s discovery, quanta; (b) calculated how many water molecules existed in 22.4 litres (a number so vast that, Isaacson tells us, “that many unpopped popcorn kernels when spread across the United States would cover the country nine miles deep”); (c) explained Brownian motion as the jostling of motes of matter by invisible molecules; (d) expounded the special theory of relativity, holding that all measurable motion is relative to some other object and that no universal coördinates, and no hypothetical ubiquitous ether, exist; and (e) asserted that mass and energy were different manifestations of the same thing and that their relation could be tidily expressed in the equation $E=mc^2$, where c is the speed of light, a constant. Only a few friends and theoretical physicists took notice.

In 1903, Einstein had married a woman three years older than he, Mileva Marić, a lame, homely Serbian he had met when both were students at the Zurich Polytechnic. It emerged only in 1986 that before their marriage the couple became parents of a girl, Lieserl, whom Einstein probably never saw and whose fate is unknown. A legitimate son, Hans Albert, was born in 1904. Einstein had not been able to secure any teaching job; his cava-



Einstein with his second wife, Elsa, on the way to the United States, and in his office in Berlin in the twenties.



lier and even defiant attitude toward academic authority worked against his early signs of promise. He had left Germany and renounced his citizenship at the age of sixteen, and for four years was too poor to buy Swiss citizenship, depending for sustenance on a monthly stipend from his mother's family and some fees from private tutorials. In the pinch, Marcel Grossmann, a brilliant math student whose meticulous lecture notes helped Einstein get high grades at the Zurich Polytechnic, managed to secure him a job at the Swiss Patent Office, in Bern. His long stint there figures, in the conventional Einstein mythology, as the absurd ordeal of a neglected genius, but Isaacson thinks it might have been a good thing:

> So it was that Albert Einstein would end up spending the most creative seven years of his life—even after he had written the papers that reoriented physics—arriving at work at 8 A.M., six days a week, and examining patent applications. . . . Yet it would be wrong to think that poring over applications for patents was drudgery. . . . Every day, he would do thought experiments based on theoretical premises, sniffing out the underlying realities. Focusing on real-life questions, he later said, "stimulated me to see the physical ramifications of theoretical concepts."

"Had he been consigned instead to the job of an assistant to a professor," Isaacson points out, "he might have felt compelled to churn out safe publications and be overly cautious in challenging accepted notions." Special relativity has a flavor of the patent office; one of the theory's charms for the fascinated public was the practical apparatus of its exposition, involving down-to-earth images like passing trains equipped with reflecting mirrors on their ceilings, and measuring rods that magically shrink with speed from the standpoint of a stationary observer, and clocks that slow as they accelerate—counterintuitive effects graspable with little more math than plane geometry.

The general theory of relativity took longer, from 1907 to 1915, and came harder. Generalizing from the special theory's assumption of uniform velocity to cases of accelerated motion, and incorporating Newton's laws of gravity into a field theory that corrected his assumption of instant gravitational effect across any distance, led Einstein into advanced areas of mathematics where he felt at sea. He turned to his invaluable friend Marcel Grossmann, now chairman of the math department at the Zurich Polytechnic; Isaacson quotes him as saying, "Grossmann, you've got to help me or I will go crazy." After consulting the literature, Grossmann "recommended the non-Euclidean geometry that had been devised by Bernhard Riemann." Einstein, beginning with the insight that acceleration and gravity exert an equivalent force, worked for years to find the equations that would describe

> 1. How a gravitational field acts on matter, telling it how to move.
> 2. And in turn, how matter generates gravitational fields in spacetime, telling it how to curve.

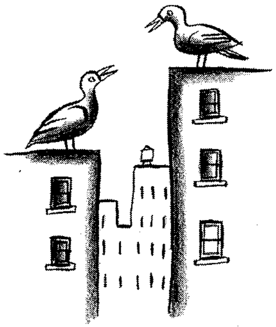
"I have gained enormous respect for mathematics," he wrote a friend, "whose more subtle parts I considered until now, in my ignorance, as pure luxury!" For a time, he discarded Riemannian tensors, but eventually returned to them, and, to quote Isaacson, "in the throes of one of the most concentrated frenzies of scientific creativity in history," he felt close enough to the solution to schedule four Thursday lectures at the Prussian Academy, in Berlin, which would unveil his "triumphant revision of Newton's universe." Then, heightening the suspense, another player entered the game. Einstein, still a little short of the full solution and beset with nervous stomach pains, showed one of his lectures to David Hilbert, "who was not only a better pure mathematician than Einstein, he also had the advantage of not being as good a physicist." Hilbert told Einstein that he was ready to lay out his own "axiomatic solution to your great problem," and the physicist battled to establish the priority of his theory even as he was putting the last, perfecting touches into his fourth and final lecture. It all came down to:

$$R_{\mu\nu} - \tfrac{1}{2}g_{\mu\nu}R = 8\pi T_{\mu\nu}$$

The other giants of physics in the first half of the twentieth century applauded. Paul Dirac called general relativity "probably the greatest scientific discovery ever made," and Max Born termed it "the greatest feat of human thinking about nature, the most amazing combination of philosophical penetration, physical intuition and mathematical skill." In 1919, the discovery was given empirical proof when Arthur Eddington, the director of the Cambridge Observatory, led an expedition to equatorial realms to observe a solar eclipse and see if, as Einstein's field equations predicted, stars near the sun's rim would be apparently displaced 1.7 arc seconds. With a little massaging from Eddington, they were. Einstein, asked what his reaction would have been if the experiment had showed his theory to be wrong, serenely replied, "Then I would have been sorry for the dear Lord; the theory is correct."

Though Einstein was to reap many honors (including the 1921 Nobel, belatedly, for his early work on the photoelectrical effect) and was to serve humanity as a genial icon and fount of humanist wisdom for three more decades, he never again made a significant contribution to the ongoing life of the physical sciences. Beginning around 1918, he devoted himself to a quest even more solitary and visionary than his relativity triumphs. "We seek," he said in his Nobel Prize lecture, "a mathematically unified field theory in which the gravitational field and the electromagnetic field are interpreted only as different components or manifestations of the same uniform field." Quantum theory, with its built-in uncertainties and paradoxes, struck him as a spooky violation of physical realism. "The more successes the quantum theory enjoys," he lamented to a friend in 1912, "the sillier it looks." In an autobiographical sketch published in 1949, he described his frustrated attempts "to adapt the theoretical foundation of physics" to quantum science: "It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere upon which one could have built," leaving "an intermediate state of physics without a uniform basis for the whole, a state that—although unsatisfactory—is far from having been overcome."

His faith that a unified theory of all the fields exists went back to his childhood sense that "something deeply hidden had to be behind things," a something that would evince itself in an encompassing theory of elegant simplicity. Isaacson tells us: "On one of the many occasions when Einstein declared that God would not play dice, it was Bohr"—the physicist Niels Bohr—"who countered with the famous rejoinder: Einstein, stop telling God what to do!" God, sometimes identified as "the Almighty" or "the Old One" (*der Alte*) frequently cropped up in Einstein's utterances, although, after a brief period of "deep religiousness" at the age of twelve, he firmly distanced himself from organized religion. In a collection of statements published in English as "The World As I See It," there is this on "The Religiousness of Science":

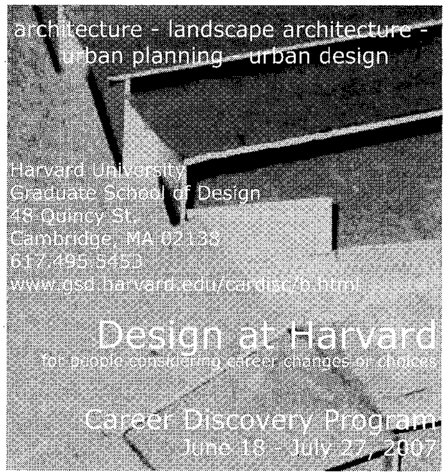


> The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. . . . His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work, in so far as he succeeds in keeping himself from the shackles of selfish desire.

The apparition of a superior intelligence behind the impassive arrangements of nature was more than a playful metaphor for Einstein, and the escape from selfishness through scientific thought was a principle he lived. In composing, at the request of an editor, his "Autobiographical Notes," he concentrated almost exclusively on his thought processes, complete with equations.

Yet things happened to him; he had a life. In 1909, the University of Zurich upped an initial offer, and Einstein, "four years after he had revolutionized physics," resigned from the patent office and accepted his first professorship. "So, now I too am an official member of the guild of whores," he told a colleague. In 1910, Mileva gave birth to a second son, Eduard, who as he grew older developed mental illness and was to end up in a Swiss asylum. In 1911, the Einsteins moved to Prague, where Einstein accepted a full professorship at the German part of the University of Prague. Offers kept coming; in 1912 he returned to the Zurich Polytechnic, which had become a full university, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule. Mileva should have been happy back in Zurich, among old friends, but her health was uncertain, carrying with it depression, and continued to decline. In 1913, an invitation was personally delivered by two pillars of Berlin's academic establishment, Max Planck and Walther Hermann Nernst, to come to Berlin as a university professor and the director of a new physics institute, and to become, at the age of thirty-four, the youngest member of the Prussian Academy. Einstein stayed in Berlin until 1932, when the combination of rising Nazism and tempting offers from America impelled him to leave Germany, never to return.

In America, Robert A. Millikan, a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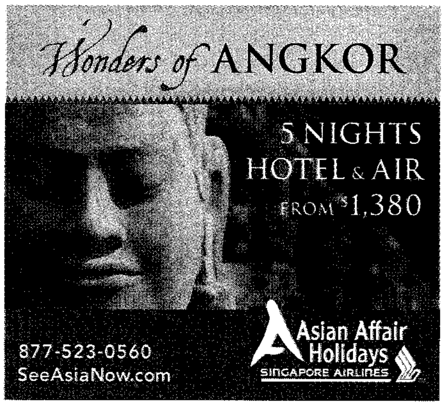
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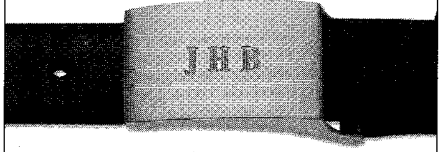
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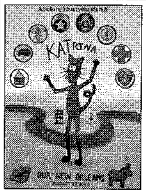
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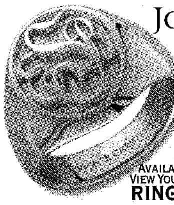

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physicist whose experiments had verified Einstein's photoelectrical equation, was now the president of Caltech, and he aggressively courted Einstein to come to Pasadena. However, the educator Abraham Flexner, a former officer of the Rockefeller Foundation, was in the process of establishing, with funds from the Bamberger department-store fortune, a haven for scholars named the Institute for Advanced Study, to be situated in New Jersey, next to but not affiliated with Princeton University. Einstein, intending to split his time between Europe and America, accepted the Princeton proposal. He and Elsa moved there, and in 1935, after renting for a few years, they bought a modest frame house at 112 Mercer Street, where Einstein lived until his death, in 1955.

He and Mileva had divorced, after many difficulties, in March, 1919. One of the attractions of Berlin in 1913 had been the presence of his divorced cousin Elsa Einstein. During the First World War, while Mileva stayed in Zurich with the two boys, Elsa and Einstein shared a life in Berlin—in his divorce deposition he gave the period of "intimate relations" as "about four and a half years." After some friction (Einstein wasn't sure that he wanted to be married at all, after the mental exertions of general relativity, but Elsa's respectable family wanted her reputation salvaged), he and Elsa married, in June, 1919. In their "spacious and somberly furnished apartment near the center of Berlin," with her two daughters, he seemed, a colleague remarked, "a Bohemian as a guest in a bourgeois home." Elsa was shrewd but, unlike Mileva Marić, not scientific, which at his stage of life and eminence may have been a blessing. Einstein and women are a complicated story, and Isaacson doesn't attempt to tell it all. There were a number of extramarital relationships; how many of them tipped from companionship into sex is, like the electron, difficult to measure. (One startling fact, according to Isaacson: beginning in 1941, Einstein was sleeping with an alleged Soviet spy, the multilingual Margarita Konenkova, though the F.B.I., which was keeping close tabs on him, never twigged.) Isaacson, a former managing editor of *Time*, whose previous biographies dealt with Benjamin Franklin and Henry Kissinger, writes in short paragraphs; taking up in rotation science and politics and personal developments, he has much material to compress. He notes that at Elsa's untimely death, in 1936, "Einstein was hit harder than he might have expected," and pronounces on their marriage:

> Beneath the surface of many romances that evolve into partnerships, there is a depth not visible to outside observers. Elsa and Albert Einstein liked each other, understood each other, and perhaps most important (for she, too, was actually quite clever in her own way) were amused by each other. So even if it was not the stuff of poetry, the bond between them was a solid one.

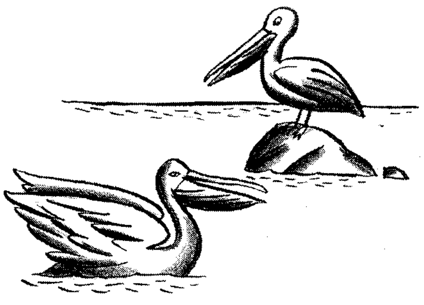
Yet when Michele Besso, an old friend from his youth in Zurich, died, not long before Einstein's own death, he wrote to Besso's family that the deceased's most admirable trait had been to live harmoniously with a woman, "an undertaking in which I twice failed rather miserably." He was married to the universe, and gave back to people less love than he attracted. Max Born said, "For all his kindness, sociability and love of humanity, he was nevertheless totally detached from his environment and the human beings in it."

But he loved America, and America reciprocated. Its informality, optimism, and emphasis on free speech delighted him: "From what I have seen of Americans, I think that life would not be worth living to them without this freedom of self expression." Except for a brief trip to Bermuda as part of his application for citizenship, he never left; he never returned to Europe, let alone to Germany, whose crimes, he wrote the chemist Otto Hahn, "are really the most abominable ever to be recorded in the history of the so-called civilized nations." To America, Isaacson says, he projected a "rumpled-genius image as famous as Chaplin[’s] little tramp." As famous as Chaplin, he appeared, to Americans of my age, as saintly as Gandhi. Einstein's public political life—his initially reluctant but eventually committed Zionism, his initially militant but eventually modified pacifism, his wartime patriotism (including a sponsoring role in the creation of the atomic bomb), his scorn of McCarthyism, and his good humor and amiable wit in shouldering all the causes and interviews he was asked to shoulder—contributed to American morale in the challenging years between 1933 and 1955. Having the greatest mind in the world on the premises lifted American spirits. In his own freedom of thought, the valiant Swabian demonstrated how to be free. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

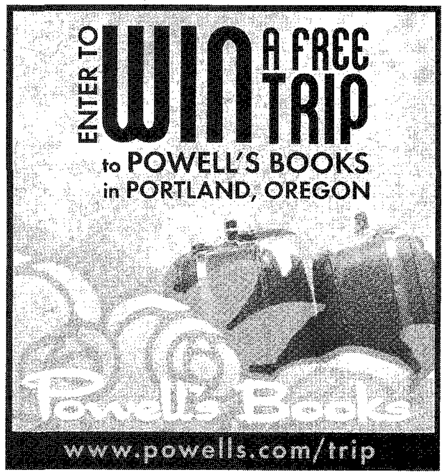
The Post-Birthday World, *by Lionel Shriver (HarperCollins; $25.95).* Irina McGovern, a children's-book illustrator, and Lawrence Trainer, a political analyst, are American expatriates living in London; their friends consider them a stalwart (if perhaps slightly boring) testament to the virtues of monogamy. But what if, while your beloved partner is in Sarajevo, you happen to find yourself getting high with a world-class snooker player whom you find extremely attractive, and you decide to give him a birthday kiss? And then again what if you refrain? In alternating chapters, Shriver allows her heroine both futures, and the result is a playful, psychologically acute, and luxuriously textured meditation on the nature of love. How much is Irina's feckless father somehow responsible for the snooker player's irresistibility? Is a partner who values your work more important than one who sticks up for you in a family fight? Can making popcorn be as meaningful as making love? Shriver's conceit may sound a little slick, but her answers to these questions prove to be anything but.

Nerve Damage, *by Peter Abrahams (Morrow; $24.95).* The care with which Abrahams brings his characters to life sets him apart from most thriller writers working today. In this inventive novel, Roy Valois, a successful sculptor, gets a very bad medical diagnosis ("Are you familiar with the term *mesothelioma,* Mr. Valois?") and, out of curiosity, asks someone to hack into his prepared *Times* obituary. The obituary contains a minor error about his wife, who has been dead for fifteen years. As it turns out, the error may not be so minor, and his wife may not be quite so dead as he thought. That leaves Roy fighting a terrible illness while trying to unravel a past that seems ever more mysterious.



The Cigarette Century, *by Allan M. Brandt (Basic; $36).* Brandt, a medical historian, has constructed an enthralling social, commercial, and medical account of the rise and fall of cigarettes in the United States in the twentieth century. Nearly all aspects of American life, from T. S. Eliot to Twinkies, cross the stage of this "drama of consumer desire." In 1900, twenty-seven per cent of tobacco consumed annually in the U.S. was in the form of cigarettes. By mid-century, that number had grown to eighty-one per cent, or three hundred and fifty billion cigarettes each year. For tobacco companies all this was vastly enriching, but, as Brandt establishes, the medical result was nothing short of a pandemic. The quest to convince the public that smoking killed was extremely fraught, thanks to Big Tobacco's campaign of dirty tricks—a campaign that included misleading advertising, pseudoscience, and pocketed politicians, and that Brandt calls "the crime of the century."

Dog Years, *by Mark Doty (HarperCollins; $23.95).* "No dog has ever said a word," Doty writes in this memoir of his retrievers, Arden and Beau, "but that doesn't mean they live outside the world of speech." Acting as an "interpreter," which he calls "part of the pet owner's work," Doty traces his relationship with his dogs from 1994, when his partner died, of AIDS, through five peripatetic years when he was a guest professor at various colleges, to the dogs' final days, in New York around the time of September 11th. A tender and amusing portrait of the dogs emerges—on the beach, Arden is like a "barrel-chested" old man in Miami; Beau loves baked beans and is never still, except when sleeping, curled up "like a golden hedgehog"—and Doty brilliantly captures the qualities that make dogs endearing. The unjudgmental state of connectedness in which they seem to live is, he feels, a "cure for our great, abiding loneliness."



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BOOKS

DANGEROUS GAMES

A Sándor Márai novel about adolescence in a time of war.

BY ARTHUR PHILLIPS

Sándor Márai keeps getting younger. Twelve years after he committed suicide, in 1989, at the age of eighty-nine, Knopf published the first American edition of his novel "Embers," which had originally appeared in Hungary when he was forty-two. That launched Márai's career in this country. Three years later came "Casanova in Bolzano," written when he was forty. Now, courtesy of George Szirtes, we have the first English translation of "The Rebels" (Knopf; $24.95), Márai's fourth novel, published when he was only thirty. It's a darkly comic, war-ravaged coming-of-age tale that displays much of the genius visible in his later works, but it's also funnier and more extravagantly imaginative than those books might have led one to expect. In 1930, of course, Márai had not yet experienced most of the great tragedies that lay in store for his nation and for him.

Márai was born in 1900, in a town in the Hungarian provinces called Kassa, where his father was a lawyer and his mother a schoolteacher, and he came to Budapest as a young man to make a career as a journalist. He succeeded, but art rapidly took precedence: volumes of poetry appeared, then plays, and a first novel when he was twenty-four. By then, the Versailles Treaty had transformed his home town into Košice, Czechoslovakia. War and politics were redrawing the map of Márai's life, and they did not stop until after his death.

He published more than sixty books in his lifetime, almost half of them novels, and from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-forties he was considered one of Hungary's leading literary men. As the Hungarian-American scholar Albert Tezla notes in an introduction to a memoir that Márai wrote in 1972, he was often described by critics and by himself as a "middle-class writer." To American ears, it's an odd distinction; our writers are either literary or commercial, but for him class identity was stronger. A character of his seems to be pronouncing an authorial credo when he says, "I am a bourgeois. I am deliberately so." Márai took the label, and the responsibilities that he felt it entailed, very seriously. He considered that his class, at its best, embodied the highest European traditions: liberal democracy, enterprise and creativity, intellectual curiosity, and duty tempered with tolerance. After the First World War, though, he saw his class fail to live up to those ideals, and he blamed its selfish refusal to shape a democracy for Hungary's interwar political troubles, and its slide toward Fascism. The middle-class writer's task now was to write an obituary: "I see the whole [class] disintegrating. Perhaps this is my life's, my writing's sole, true duty: to delineate the course of this disintegration."

He chronicled it from within a disintegrating nation. The Versailles Treaty reduced Hungary's size by two-thirds, and political chaos followed. Order finally took the form of the authoritarian reign of Miklós Horthy, who was proclaimed Regent, although Hungary had no king, and who was still called "Admiral," although Hungary had lost its coast under the treaty. Horthy's regime, which Márai detested, brought Hungary into the Second World War as a lukewarm ally of Nazi Germany, and Márai responded with what he called "internal emigration"—"by turning completely inward, toward my work."

Living under a dismal government, on the wrong side of another world war, Márai found himself preoccupied with the problems of the past, and his fiction from this era—"Casanova in Bolzano" and "Embers"—explored how history is claimed and reinterpreted in people's efforts to determine the future. In "Casanova in Bolzano," set in the seventeen-fifties, the middle-aged Casanova returns to the town where, years earlier, he lost a duel over a young girl. The man who wounded him, the Duke of Parma, is now old and dying, and the girl has become the Duke's wife. In a series of dialogues in Casanova's hotel room, the Duke and the Duchess attempt to determine the meaning of that duel, to contradictory purposes. The Duke wants the Duchess's unqualified devotion; the Duchess wants Casanova to acknowledge her as his one true love. With their happiness at stake, both describe to Casanova a future based on their own understanding of the past, and both try to charm or bully him into seeing events as they do.

Two years later, when "Embers" was published, the moral collapse of Hungary's middle class was patent, and the novel is decidedly more sombre, the future it depicts less malleable. After a long, self-imposed exile, during which he has surrendered his Hungarian citizenship, a man returns to face a childhood friend, a retired general whose wife he tried to steal forty years earlier. She's dead now, and the two old men, with very little future ahead of them, pass a long night in an attempt to settle blame. One of them wants only to see clearly the degree to which he misunderstood his youth and his life; the other, not having won the woman, wants only to thwart his old friend, keeping all secrets and clarity to himself. With little to gain except a peaceful deathbed and old men's pride, the two wrangle over the meaning of what has gone before.

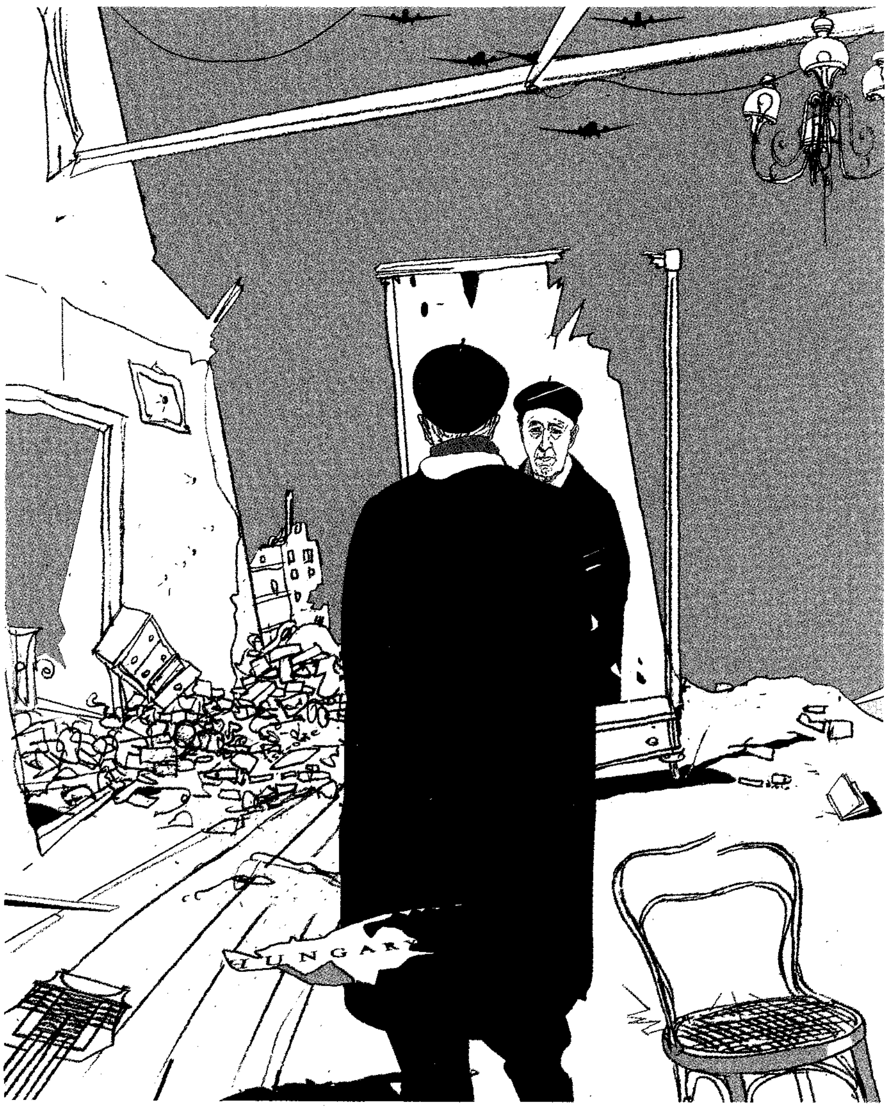
In "Casanova in Bolzano," when the conversations end, the Venetian lover is left alone with his thoughts. "The candles had guttered," Márai writes, "but were still smoking." In the closing pages of "Embers," after the long debate about the past, the old general says, "Look at that, the candles are burned right down." And, indeed, the image provides the book's Hungarian title, "A Gyertyák Csonkig Égnek" ("The Candles Burn Right Down"). In "The Rebels," a dozen years before, a scene is set with the line "*A gyertya csonkig égett*": "The candle had burned right down. They could see only outlines in the darkness." The image obviously spoke to Márai. By the failing light of a nominally independent Hungary, he wrestled with the question of when things had gone so horribly wrong. For all his efforts to understand, the future arrived noisily in 1944, and his fruitful period of internal emigration came to an end. The Nazis invaded their sluggish partner; rabid Hungarian Fascists dispatched Admiral Horthy, who was a moderate by comparison, to Germany; the Hungarian role in the Holocaust began in earnest; and Márai retreated to the countryside. There he was soon overrun, from the other direction, by the Soviet invasion.

After the German surrender, and a dangerous year spent living in close quarters with the Red Army, he returned to the ruins of his Budapest home, which had been bombed to the foundations. He clambered over his crushed top hat, his candlesticks, his photographs, and salvaged from what had been a six-thousand-volume library a single book, "On the Care of a Middle-Class Dog." Considering his belief that "the arts exist to keep us from falling into ruin," it must have required great courage to go back to writing.

Márai was able to publish for a while longer, as he watched the Hungarian Communists, with Soviet backing and the acquiescence of many other writers, seize power. When he realized that he would no longer be able to emigrate into his work—that he would not even be allowed to keep a dignified silence in the face of totalitarian oppression—he left his homeland, for the last time, in the summer of 1948. After sojourns in Switzerland and Italy, he came to the United States, living in New York and then settling in San Diego when he was seventy-nine. Even after Hungarian liberalization, in the nineteen-seventies, he refused to visit his homeland or allow his books to be published there unless two unlikely demands were met: that the Soviet occupation end and free elections be held. In 1989, having lost his wife, his adopted son, his sister, and his brothers, he declared himself "a thoughtless guest who has overstayed his welcome." But death did not come quickly enough. "I am beginning to lose my patience," he said. Within a year of his suicide, the Soviets were withdrawing, and the Hungarians had held free elections.

Rewind to May, 1918. The First World War is coming to a bad end, and a middle class still exists in provincial Austria-Hungary. That is the setting of "The Rebels," a novel about young men who, coming of age as their world is destroyed, confuse growing up with dying, adulthood with war.

The Great War has another six months to run, but in an unnamed and almost completely empty town its toll is painfully clear. "The town dozes among mountains," Márai writes, but, if he raises expectations of a romantic, post-card Europe, it's only to dash them: "A good spring moon tends to magnify whatever it illuminates. It would be very hard to give a proper scientific explanation for this. All objects—houses, public squares, whole towns—puff themselves up with spring moonlight, swelling and bloating like corpses in the river. The river dragged such corpses through town at a run." The brief panorama of the village includes the butcher shop ("great swelling animal carcasses hanging on hooks . . . a calf's head, its eyes closed, black blood dripping from its nostrils") and a lawyer's study ("Several thousand butterflies lined the walls in glass cases. . . . He carried the cyanide bottle and the butterfly net around with him everywhere. . . . He had lost two sons in the war"). Trains still arrive at the pretty little station nestled amid snowcapped mountains, but the passengers are often the war dead. Buckets of lime and bored sanitation workers await them.



Márai found his subject in the disintegration of his class and country.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Even within this desolation, however, youth persists. Ábel and three of his friends have just finished their high-school examinations. They look out onto the adult world they are about to join, and are disgusted. The four young men face an unpleasant prospect: "In six weeks' time they would be in uniform and, with one great effort, even if the training dragged on, they'd be out at the front by the end of August."

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Though their fathers either are at war or have been damaged by it, the boys live in terror of them: "There was no limit to the power of fathers." Béla, the dim son of the rich grocer, "was as terrified of his father as simple people are of natural disasters." Childhood had meant being beaten for "not holding a knife and fork in the proper manner," and wetting one's pants in fear. Ernő's father, a cobbler who has been broken, body and soul, by the war, served as a hangman at the front and is proud that his colonel allowed him to execute officers, not just common soldiers. Back home, he torments his son in fits of shell-shocked insanity. Márai describes each boy's life in terms of smells: "Tibor's house was discreetly scented with lavender, the smell of genteel poverty and sickness, combined with the rather more combative smell of cured leather." Tibor, the golden child of the town's colonel, was in second grade when his father horse-whipped him for being unable to remove the man's riding boots.

Joined by Tibor's brother, who has returned from the front with only one arm (throughout the book, he is referred to as "the one-armed one"), the young men rebel. They drink and gamble, of course, play mind games with one another and confound their teachers, make up stories, smoke and mope. They steal for no real purpose, and order bespoke suits in lunatic designs—costumes they wear only in one another's company, in a secret hideout in a crumbling spa hotel called the Peculiar.

The boys' early escapades have a nearly slapstick quality, which may surprise admirers of the stern "Embers," with its gripping speeches about duty and friendship, but "The Rebels" gives a child's perspective on the virtues that old men explore in the later book. The boys, with their outlandish clothes and useless stolen goods, pay ironic tribute to the values of their fathers; hard work and daring are cherished, as long as they're pointless. Béla, Tibor, and the rest will toil like madmen to learn a few phrases of Swedish, but they refuse to do their Tacitus homework. They hope that in their hideout they will find a place where "real life could finally begin," a life that "wasn't like their fathers' lives."

They come to the attention of a travelling actor, a mincing, middle-aged outsider more than willing to hang around with a group of teen-agers who admire his eccentricity and apparent experience, "lurking with them in a befitting manner." The actor leads them into disgrace, and, in short order, their games are over. The boys are trapped, betrayed by the adult world but also by one of their own, caught in the teeth of a con game. While there's some suspense after this (Will they find their way to safety? Will their families protect them? How much of their misbehavior will come to light?), plot, as in "Embers" and "Casanova in Bolzano," is secondary to the exploration of character.

As a coming-of-age tale, "The Rebels," for all its black humor, exists within a genre that has considerable currency in literature and cinema. Hollywood has had no shortage of poor kids driven mad by envy of their wealthier pals, causeless rebels, anxious adolescents wrestling with sexuality—no shortage, indeed, of youthful games that bleed into adult betrayals. Like other rebels, Márai's characters struggle to understand love and friendship and the fuzzy line between the two. ("I love you. . . . Maybe it is because you are beautiful," Ábel tells Tibor. "You're not, if I may say, particularly bright.") They must untangle loyalty, duty, individuality, the divisive power of class and wealth. Ábel shows signs of eventually becoming a writer. "Beware of such," the itinerant actor says of writers who hold themselves back from the action, the better to observe it. "Sin begins the moment you leave the circle and watch from outside."

The artist, writer, and actor as corrupting or otherwise morally dubious influences is a notion that turns up in both of those later Márai novels, and also in the works of his elders. There's just something about 1918; the book's pervasive moral and physical sickness (we get characters who are bedridden, crippled, shell-shocked, insane, mass-murdering) may remind you of other novels from the twenties and thirties—Thomas Mann's "The Magic Mountain," or Joseph Roth's "The Radetzky March," or Robert Musil's "The Man Without Qualities." That's neither entirely coincidental nor to Márai's discredit; he breathed the same air as those great writers. By 1942, with "Embers," Márai had achieved an individual style. That novel—with its long, swirling monologues, its psychological depth, its examination of the layered meanings in a single, long-ago betrayal—is unique, inimitable. Back in 1930, though, he was still writing books that were merely very, very good.

But even when dealing with familiar motifs or inherited plots, he proves his power. In "The Rebels," stock characters—the invalid mother, the poor boy with ambition, the fruity actor, the wounded veteran back from the front, the merciless Jewish pawnbroker—pulse with life. And the language is often breathtaking: "He danced on half-naked. His heavy breasts shook with each maneuver and his bare back shimmered like pale bacon in the spotlight." Márai's wit is displayed on every page, and he can shift smoothly from vicious irony to heartbreak: Tibor "represented the two-armed branch of the Prockauer family. . . . The one-armed one tended to lie in bed during storms with a pillow over his head."

Unlike other writers who were forced into exile by the horrors of twentieth-century Europe, Sándor Márai did not oversee the creation of an English-language persona, and that is part of the reason he died in obscurity. During the four decades in which he lived away from his homeland, he wrote only in Hungarian. Perhaps he was too old—he left Hungary when he was forty-eight—or perhaps he was too attached to his native tongue. In his memoir, he describes his last-minute hesitation before escaping from Hungary as the Communists tightened their grip: "I didn't want to leave my native land without taking something with me for the long journey. Something that I would never again find elsewhere." His keepsake may strike one as odd:

> I did nothing else but read. . . . I didn't open books by foreign writers. I read the works of Hungarian writers. But not the . . . classics . . . not even the great generation of our own century . . . but those of the less noted. . . . I kept sampling this pure, powerful prose like someone who has stumbled on a buried cellar where he discovers a barrel filled with an old vintage. . . . I began to search the works of "the second set" of Hungarian writers for what I wanted to take with me, because I knew I would never find any trace of them abroad.

When the borders were closing, and the secret police were circling, and the publishing house was telling him to stop writing, and his income had trickled to nothing, and his friends were leaving or being arrested, he spent an extra year in libraries, gulping down second-tier Hungarian literature, like a camel preparing for a desert crossing.

He may have despaired that he would ever reach the other side. In the event, his suicide, the same year Hungary cast off Communism, marked the beginning of his restoration in his homeland. He is now read widely and taught in schools, and he received, posthumously, Hungary's highest literary prize. (A statue of him, however, stands in Košice, now Czech-less Slovakia, implying that he is not so much a Hungarian writer as an Austro-Hungarian writer.) Meanwhile, American readers must approach him through the imperfect correspondence of translation. "Embers" had a layover in German before arriving in English. The very accomplished Anglo-Hungarian poet George Szirtes, who also translated "Casanova in Bolzano," renders "The Rebels" in luminous prose, albeit with something of a British accent. (Horsemen wear "breeches" and brothel guests pay a "tariff"; one character uses the term "haroosh"—it means, research reveals, a rumpus or a witch hunt, more or less—which seems to be slang used in the British bureaucracy of colonial India.) In the meantime, there are still two dozen novels in Márai's native language, bristling with *ű*, *ő*, and *sz*, that were left behind when the great middle-class writer rode the train across the border. "We left the bridge and traveled on in the star-studded night toward the world where no one was waiting for us," Márai wrote of his departure. "In this moment—for the first time in my life—I really felt fear." After two world wars, after the destruction of his home and his career, after his country's colonization by Russia, fear gripped him only as he left the past behind, and faced—like so many of his characters—an uncertain future by a dim light. ♦

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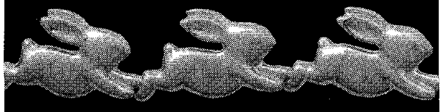

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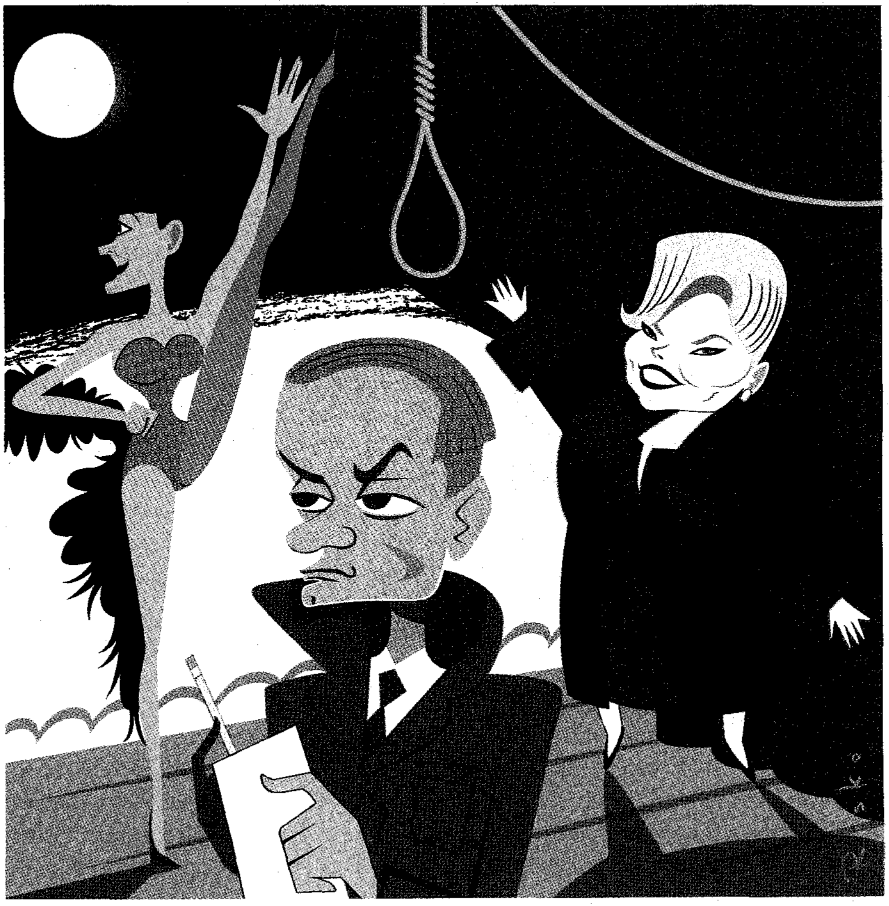
“Curtains” and “Jack Goes Boating.”

BY JOHN LAHR

“Why must the show go on?” Noël Coward asked, twitting the legendary stoicism of show-biz folk in his 1954 song, and adding, “Why kick up your legs/When draining the dregs/Of sorrow’s bitter cup?/Because you have read/Some idiot has said,/‘The curtain must go up!’ ” At the beginning of “Curtains” (cleverly directed by Scott Ellis, at the Al Hirschfeld), the same question is posed, albeit without the same tart brilliance, by one of the mutinous cast members of a lame “Oklahoma!” retread called “Robbin’ Hood of the Old West,” after its disastrous opening-night tryout in Boston. The show-must-go-on canard is mouthed by the producer, Carmen Bernstein (the formidable Debra Monk), a termagant with timing. The Boston critics have murdered her show—“Does ‘debacle’ have two meanings?” Carmen asks. As it turns out, while taking a curtain call, the inept and unliked leading lady, Jessica Cranshaw (the amusing Patty Goble), has also been murdered. “Our star is dead!” the cast sings. “She had no voice/She had no wits.” To which Carmen chimes in, “She had no brains, she just had tits.” In the course of the evening, the death toll rises. We have the makings of both a whodunit and a why-do-it.

“Curtains” deftly and unabashedly addresses both questions. The answer to the latter is to make a buck, a credo spelled out with bracing authority by Carmen. “Gorky/Shmorky,” Monk sings in “It’s a Business,” pooh-poohing nonprofit theatre. “Money misspent/You won’t survive Yom Kippur/You’ll never get through Lent.” The task of sorting out the murderer from the MacGuffins falls to the beady, stagestruck Boston police detective Lieutenant Frank Cioffi (the droll, pitch-perfect David Hyde Pierce), who, as the evening wears on, also sorts out the gnarly production problems of the show’s flat eleven-o’clock number. Since none of the cast and crew can leave the theatre until the murderer is found, the theatricals do what they always do on Broadway when they have hours to kill—they keep singing and dancing.

Broadway musicals do better telling about the folderol of their play world than about the fiasco of the real one. Originally conceived by the Broadway pros Peter Stone, John Kander, and Fred Ebb (the book and additional lyrics are by Rupert Holmes), “Curtains” is ingeniously put together and smart about show business; with witty contributions from the set designer Anna Louizos and the costume designer William Ivey Long, it expertly spoofs everything to do with the clichés of the Broadway musical. At once a musical within a musical, a thriller, a backstage drama, and a romance, it is the narrative equivalent of a Dagwood sandwich, stuffed with relish and a lot of ham. The Swift Premium Award goes to Edward Hibbert, as the bitchy, twitchy director Christopher Belling. When Cioffi fingers him as one of “my first official murder suspects,” Hibbert crisply replies, “Well, it’s an honor just to be nominated.”



Karen Ziemba, David Hyde Pierce, and Debra Monk in Kander and Ebb’s finale.

ROBERT RISKO

Scott Ellis’s playful storytelling matches the novelty of the plot. The stage perspectives shift as sensationally as the murder suspects: we watch the finale of “Robbin’ Hood” from the points of view of both the audience and the actors; Act II opens from the orchestra pit, where the conductor sings a song; and one scene is played on a flybridge high above the stage. Rob Ashford’s humorous choreography gives a terrific boost to Ellis’s stage pictures. He turns the hearty barroom sendup “Thataway!” into something altogether more suggestive, and when Hyde Pierce finds himself being taught a time step by Niki (Jill Paice), his favorite chorine, he goes into a Ginger Rogers–Fred Astaire fantasy. Ashford has great fun teasing the aplomb of the iconic pair, maneuvering the tangled actors up a white staircase with a chandelier above, satin curtains all around, and a smoke machine working like fury from offstage.

On Broadway, stasis is the name of the musical's good-time game; by the finale of "Curtains," we are literally back where we started. If the show indicates anything, it's that if you don't know where you're going you can't get lost. The happy world of "Curtains" is lived entirely between quotation marks; meanings and feelings aren't really in order. The exception is the song "I Miss the Music," in which the nature of collaboration is explained to the jejune detective, and genuine longing finds its way into the manic fun. (Fred Ebb died in 2004, ending a musical partnership with Kander that began in 1962.) The score is bright without being distinguished, but the song achieves a special—almost jarring—eloquence:

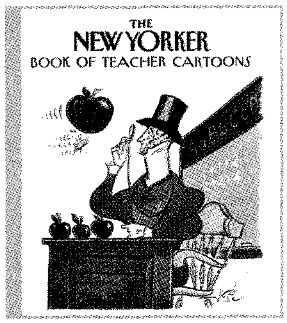
> But when you're writing a song
> Without a partner
> That's a completely different matter.
> No one tells you
> That's not funny.
> No one says, "Let's cut that bar."
> No one makes you better than you are.

At the end of "Curtains," the cast sings, "Sometimes we're not too certain/What's false and what's real/But we're seldom in doubt about what we feel." In Bob Glaudini's "Jack Goes Boating" (a LAByrinth production at the Public, directed by Peter DuBois), the cast members are always in doubt about what they feel. The play, which is a modern-day "Marty," is uneven but affecting. It addresses the compelling psychological problems of how the psyche gets stuck and how it gets moving. Jack (the riveting Philip Seymour Hoffman), a limousine driver, exists at first in an almost autistic solitude, cut off by a fearfulness that he can't articulate but by which he is transparently punished. His best and only friends—Clyde (John Ortiz) and his wife, Lucy (Daphne Rubin-Vega)—set him up with the shy, fragile Connie (the poignant Beth Cole), who is figuratively and literally beaten up by the caprice of life. (She gets mugged in the subway.) Jack and Connie slowly reach out to each other. Jack must learn to swim by spring in order to keep his promise to take Connie rowing in Central Park, so flow is the actual as well as the metaphorical issue of the play.

Jack is emotionally frozen. He is first seen huddled on a sofa in Clyde's comfortable apartment in cap, muffler, and overcoat. He is a stolid, ungainly, monosyllabic lump, whose rigidity is magnified by the married couple's surface sexual ease and bonhomie. He can't assert himself; instead, he lets the reggae song "Rivers of Babylon," which he constantly plays on his tape recorder, speak his inchoate estrangement and longing. While the play unpersuasively tracks the distrust in Clyde and Lucy's fraught relationship, it is successful in exploring Jack's and Connie's tentative progress toward trust. They kiss. ("Nothing overwhelming," Jack says, leaning in for the first time.) They explore each other. ("I like how you touch me. How you barely touch my skin," Connie tells him.) They make plans. "Maybe, I don't know, dinner when you're better," he says when he visits her in the hospital, after the mugging. "Make it a big feast." "No one has ever cooked for me before," she says, misunderstanding him. Jake must now learn to cook as well as swim. He takes the risk.

Jack's attempt to master his fear provides the play's most memorable moments. The cunning use of blue neon and tiles conjures the pool in which Clyde coaches Jack from the sidelines. "Let everything flow," Clyde yells at one point late in the show. "Good, see, you're swimming. There is no deep end. You're at the deep end but there is no deep end." In the slow acquisition of poise, Hoffman makes a thrilling spectacle of the battle between trepidation and validation. As Jack does a run-through of the meal for Connie, he goes over the hand motions of preparing the main course: "Sift flour. Pinch of sea-son salt. Crumbs." The moment is radiant—Hoffman's stiff fingers and hint of smile somehow catch the soul's struggle to turn will into command. Connie doesn't quite get her home cooking, but she does find a home in Jack. In a rowboat at the finale, they glide on the water. "I'm a good swimmer," Jack says. "I knew you would be," Connie tells him. "I am for you," he replies. Jack, who has tried to fathom the meaning of the lyrics of "Rivers of Babylon"—"So let the words of our mouths/and the meditations of our hearts/be acceptable in thy sight"—now lives them. He is finally acceptable in the eyes of another. The song is a prayer; the production's accomplishment is to leave the audience with a sense of blessing. ♦

A school of laughs



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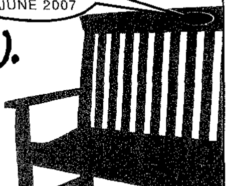

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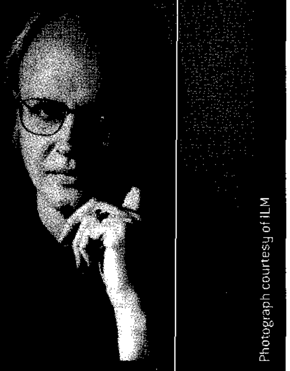

Photograph courtesy of ILM

FEATURING

DENNIS MUREN

Dennis Muren is the senior visual-effects supervisor for Industrial Light & Magic. He has received eight Academy Awards, for "Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back" and "Jurassic Park," among other films.

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MUSICAL EVENTS

THE WOW FACTOR

Lang Lang and Yundi Li at Carnegie Hall.

BY ALEX ROSS

In the classical-music world of ten or fifteen years ago, you heard intermittent murmurs of unease about the number of Asian performers who were showing up on the rolls of conservatories, in the ranks of orchestras, and on concert stages. The oft-repeated criticism was that these players showed great technical dexterity but lacked the mysteries of "depth" and "soul." Such talk had an unsavory taste; Wagner used to say the same thing about musical Jews. In any case, the muttering has died down. When Yo-Yo Ma entrances audiences through the force of his personality, when Mitsuko Uchida delves deeper into Mozart and Schubert than almost any pianist alive, and when the virtuosos Lang Lang and Yundi Li conquer crowds with youthful bravado, notions of an "Asian type" can be filed away in the archive of dumb generalizations. The huge popularity of classical music in the Far East, and particularly in China, has created a talent pool a billion deep, from which a disarmingly varied group of musicians is emerging. The irony inherent in the old stereotype is that those fleet-fingered, impersonal performers (yes, there were some) replicated the values of a Western conservatory system that has long emphasized sheer technique at the expense of all else. The music world was, in effect, scapegoating Asians for its own defects.

Earlier this month, Lang Lang and Li appeared at Carnegie Hall forty-eight hours apart. Lang Lang played the Bartók Second Piano Concerto, with the Vienna Philharmonic, under Daniel Barenboim. Li played the Liszt First Piano Concerto, with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, under Riccardo Chailly. The two pianists have a few things in common: both were born in China in 1982; both can execute rapid figuration and double octaves with almost irritating ease; both record for the Deutsche Grammophon label; and both are notable for the variety of their hair styles, ranging from the wavy to the spiky and back again. But they're hardly interchangeable.

Listening to Lang Lang, I think of the absurdist pundit Stephen Colbert, who promises not to read the news to his viewers but to *feel* the news *at* them. Lang Lang feels the music at you, in ways both good and bad. He advertises his love of performing simply by the way he charges onstage, and he creates a giddy atmosphere as he negotiates hairpin turns at high speed. Stereotypes to the contrary, you wish at times that he were a little more impersonal. He tends to impose his ebullience on the music, whether or not the music demands it. At his Carnegie Hall solo début, in 2003, he memorably mangled a sequence of pieces by Schumann, Haydn, and Schubert, effectively rewriting them in a humid Romantic-Impressionist style. He is, however, steadily maturing as an artist, and already makes a less willful impression.

Pianists often mention the Bartók Second Concerto as the most taxing piece in the concerto repertory. (The Brahms Second and the Rachmaninoff Third are cited alongside it.) The difficulty lies not just in the writing itself but in the fact that the cascades of notes are intended to conjure a "light and popular" atmosphere, as Bartók himself said. This work, written in the wake of nineteen-twenties neoclassicism, sparkles with Baroque-style counterpoint and Classical melodic play. Lang Lang, who deserves credit for taking on such non-standard fare, flew through the music with ease, but his touch was too hard. He tended to bang out chords at the end of a phrase, relying on extraneous accents to give shape to a line rather than finding its inner contour. Bartók's requests for *leggiero, dolce,* and *grazioso*—light, sweet, graceful playing—often went unheeded; *p* became *mf, mf* became *ff.* Only in the final movement were he and the composer fully in synch. Grins broke out in

The ebullient Lang Lang is maturing as an artist. Photograph by Ulrike Schamoni.

the audience during the climactic passage where the pianist pounds the lower end of the instrument in tandem with the timpani and bass drum.

Yundi Li is a cooler presence. His playing is refined, almost severe. He has an intelligent way of shaping phrases, controlling dynamics, varying articulations. When Liszt uses the word *dolcissimo* in the score of the First Concerto—as sweetly as possible—Li responds in kind; he's a more naturally poetic soul than Lang Lang. Too often at this Carnegie appearance, though, he seemed in his own world, reluctant to enter into a real give-and-take with the orchestra. In the concerto's finale, when orchestra and soloist trade dotted rhythms back and forth, Li kept barrelling ahead of the rest of the ensemble; you wanted him to enjoy these showy phrases a little more, pick up a trick or two from the swaggering brass. Still, it was a captivating performance, the kind that you remember as much for its quiet stretches as for its "wow factor," to borrow a term from "American Idol." Let's hope that Li branches out from his favorite Chopin and Liszt. He could deliver a superlative performance of the Bartók Second.

The venerable Gewandhaus Orchestra, which came across as disappointingly shabby at its previous New York appearance, sounds startlingly revitalized in the hands of Chailly, who took over as music director in 2005. Strauss's tone poem "Ein Heldenleben" made a sublime racket on the second half of the program; Chailly is a master of color and pacing, a spellbinding storyteller. In the sharpness of their musical characterizations, the Leipzigers outclassed the Viennese, who did not have their best outing in the all-Bartók program I heard. A decade after the Philharmonic announced that it would begin admitting women to its ranks, it still has only one fully accredited female member (Charlotte Balzereit, a harpist). It is also blindingly white. Defenders maintain that the Philharmonic cannot abandon its storied traditions in the name of Americanized notions of political correctness, but the chief argument for diversity is, in fact, aesthetic. The Vienna sound is showing symptoms of atrophy; witness the excessively polished, inert rendition of Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta that ended the program. The orchestra may have to draw on a wider array of talent if it is to hold its place at the pinnacle.

While Lang Lang and Li lay claim to the Romantic tradition, other gifted young pianists—among them Jonathan Biss, Inon Barnatan, Ingrid Fliter, and Paul Lewis—are taking up the high-minded, anti-virtuoso tradition exemplified by Uchida and Alfred Brendel. The first three recently appeared in New York, trailing the release of outstanding new CDs: Biss has an all-Schumann disk on the E.M.I. label; Barnatan has recorded, for Bridge, Schubert's august B-Flat-Major Sonata; and Fliter pairs Beethoven and Chopin on VAI Audio. Lewis, who has made an impressive start on a Beethoven cycle for the Harmonia Mundi label, comes to Mostly Mozart this summer.

Biss's recital took place at the Met Museum's superbly curated Piano Forte series. On the program were Beethoven's "Pathétique," Webern's Piano Variations, Mozart's Sonata in F (K. 533), and Schumann's "Kreisleriana." Biss offered no radical reinterpretations, but at almost any given moment he seemed to be making the right artistic choice. The slow sections of "Kreisleriana" and the middle movements of the Mozart and the Beethoven magically approximated the sound of one man thinking aloud. Only in the Webern Variations did the pianist fall short; that snowstorm of notes passed by a little too quickly, without settling into a dream landscape.

There's something almost surreal in the sight and sound of a twenty-six-year-old playing with such unerring sophistication. Listening blind, you might take Biss to be an elderly gentleman of Budapest or Prague, one who has a faint childhood memory of what life was like before Hitler and TV. Sometimes I found myself wishing, perversely, that he would do something peculiar or crude, just for the sake of variety. Lang Lang is the kind of performer you really want to hear when he has grown up a bit and settled down. Biss, on the other hand, may someday wish to take a few more risks, to push against the flow of the music that he understands so well. Then again, why would he want to play differently when he is so close to perfection? ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MEN GONE WILD

"Shooter" and "300."

BY DAVID DENBY

Mark Wahlberg as a betrayed Marine marksman in Antoine Fuqua's movie.

An incomparable marksman, stealthy, silent, relentless, hiding among snowcapped peaks; the muzzle of a high-powered rifle aimed directly at the camera; helicopters swirling over mountains and city streets, pursuing the hero from the sky; gunmetal colors everywhere, and the *chuggah-chuggah-chuggah* of pounding drums and electronic music, a sound both primal and advanced at the same time: "Shooter," directed by Antoine Fuqua and starring Mark Wahlberg, as Bob Lee Swagger, a betrayed Marine marksman who becomes a vigilante crusader for justice, is a virtual textbook of action clichés. Fuqua made something fiery and memorable out of "Training Day" (2001), with its demonic performance by Denzel Washington as a corrupt cop, but here the director serves as little more than a skilled functionary. For two hours, chase follows shoot-out as Swagger fires at men who, like movie targets from time immemorial, obligingly refuse to take cover. Swagger never misses—he could hunt mosquitoes for a living—and the extras, both live and digital, do their job; they fall down. The action has an oddly undifferentiated, wearying feel to it. Yet this standard industrial product does something strange. On the surface, the movie offers liberal ideological sentiments: it condemns covert overseas operations controlled by oil interests; it's angry at the higher-ups who escaped blame for Abu Ghraib; it exhibits a clear distaste for the person and values of Dick Cheney. But it places these sentiments within a matrix of gun culture and lonely-man-of-honor myths. Swagger is the latest incarnation of Rambo, the anti-government crazy. The filmmakers may be trying to appeal both to liberals and to the Pat Buchanan conservatives who hate big government and multinational corporations and want American warriors to stay home. The clash of political currents suggests the degree of confusion roiling Hollywood at the moment. How do moviemakers find military heroes in the midst of an unpopular overseas war?

When we first see Swagger, he is taking down uniformed soldiers as part of a mysterious operation somewhere in the Horn of Africa. The operation is scrubbed, and Swagger and his partner, a spotter, are abandoned. Outraged, Swagger quits the Marines, and moves to a cabin in Wyoming with his dog. But he's pulled back into action by a retired colonel (Danny Glover), who works in some unnamed federal agency. The colonel tells Swagger that a sniper may be planning to assassinate the President, and the agency needs Swagger to think like him and track him down. But the hero is being set up—made to look (for reasons I will not explain) as though he's the one attempting the hit. The plotters try to eliminate their patsy on the spot. Swagger is shot twice, falls through a window, nearly drowns in the Delaware River, yet, with all of law enforcement after him, manages to escape into the American nowhere. Throughout the rest of the movie, he takes vengeance on the swine who tried to do him in—a rogue unit in the government, operating under the control of a powerful, oil-mad senator from Montana (the Cheney figure, played by Ned Beatty). The government may be rotten, but American honor is saved by the lone killer.

The movie is based on the successful 1993 novel "Point of Impact," by the Washington *Post* film critic Stephen Hunter, whose glumly macho fictions (there are three Bob Lee Swagger books) are very different in tone from his shrewd and funny reviews. Swagger has many notches on his gun. From a distance, in hiding, he has killed dozens of people in war, and the movie celebrates his prowess in all its solitary cultic glory while wrapping him in an aura of sanctimonious approval. The mechanics of audience manipulation may be obvious here, but they often work. The shooter, twice betrayed, becomes a victim. His fight against corrupt enemies absolves him of any personal guilt, and we can simultaneously enjoy his skill at picking people off and the righteousness of his wrath.

The screenwriter, Jonathan Lemkin, has acknowledged a debt not only to Hunter but to "Three Days of the Condor" and "The Parallax View," seventies thrillers that drew on fears of shadowy government conspiracies. Lemkin has updated the old plots with gun-catalogue lore. The movie is full of contented talk of rifles and ammunition, and at one point Swagger picks up an astounding amount of what can only be called ordnance at a Virginia shopping

FRANK STOCKTON

mall. Snub-nosed and barrel-chested, Wahlberg looks a little like a gun himself. "What I love about Mark," the movie's producer, Lorenzo di Bonaventura, has said, "is he's not afraid to be a man." Perhaps not, but di Bonaventura and Fuqua seem afraid to let him be an actor. In this role, he certainly has the stillness and the determination of a marksman, but he mutters in a sludgy monotone that's hard to understand. Wahlberg has an unpretentious air about him, and I'd hate to see him get locked into dour star turns as an implacable killer. The engaging, fast-talking idiosyncrasy of his performance in "The Departed" has vanished.

In "300," a blood-dark account of the battle of Thermopylae, the Spartan king, Leonidas (Gerard Butler), and his noble queen, Gorgo (Lena Headey), make love in the full splendor of their nakedness. When the Spartans, pumped like linebackers leaving the weight room, go out to fight, they wear nothing but leather codpieces and red capes; they die clutching one another's hands. The Persians go one better. Their king, Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro), an epicene seven-footer with a shaved head and what looks like a gold-lamé thong, lounges on cushions in his court, surrounded by aroused lesbians intertwined and writhing like snakes in a basket. When *he* goes out to fight, he commands an army of robed and turbaned slaves who enthusiastically hurl themselves onto Spartan spears. "300," which grossed nearly a hundred and thirty million dollars in its first ten days of release, is perhaps the nuttiest film ever to become an enormous box-office hit. Based on a graphic novel by Frank Miller, the movie is a porno-military curiosity—a muscle-magazine fantasy crossed with a video game and an Army recruiting film. The director, Zack Snyder, poses the Spartan heroes against the horizon or along the crests of mountains under roiling skies. The softening colors of blue and yellow have been filtered or drained out of the palette; the dominant remaining color is the molten brown-gold of bronze shields. The action is prolonged in agonizing slow motion, only to snap to hyper-speed and then to a full stop, leaving nothing moving but the fountain of blood spurting from a decapitated body.

In Tehran, after pirated copies hit the streets there a few weeks ago, the movie was quickly denounced by an Iranian government spokesman as an act of "psychological warfare" that was intended to prepare Americans for an invasion of the country. "American cultural officials thought they could get mental satisfaction by plundering Iran's historic past and insulting this civilization," he said. The complaint was echoed by President Ahmadinejad, who said, "They are trying to tamper with history . . . by making Iran's image look savage," and a *Time* correspondent reported that many Iranians assumed that the movie was produced by an American government conspiracy. It is perhaps unfair to expect the Iranians to develop a sense of humor about American pop culture. They may also have trouble understanding that commercial American movies are ordered up not by "cultural officials" but by studio officials. The film is, of course, less an act of psychological warfare than an act of capitalism. It was called into being not by a hunger for war but by the desire to exploit a market—professional-wrestling and X-treme Fighting saturnalias play into the movie's atmosphere. Everyone screams at everyone, and specialized Persian warriors wearing masks and other freakish regalia turn up to do battle. Pop has always drawn energy from the lower floors of respectability; this movie, in which fan-boy cultism reaches new levels of goofy chaos and sexual confusion, draws energy from the subbasement.

Still, the Iranians have a point: though first planned years ago, "300" is a political fable that uneasily engages the current moment. An all-volunteer expeditionary force of Spartans ventures forth, the warriors sacrificing themselves to stop the invading hordes from killing their wives and children, which may be an allusion to the Bush Administration's get-them-in-Iraq-before-they-hit-us-here rationale. The Spartans also fight, as a lofty narration informs us, "against mysticism and tyranny." Against *mysticism*? How many ancient armies went to their deaths with that as their battle song? And how many men have died, as the Spartans do, to defend "reason"? A whiff of contemporary disdain for the East—what the late Edward Said called "Orientalism"—arises from the mayhem: "300" turns into a dawn-of-democracy epic in which violence is marshalled to protect the future of Western civilization. Made in a time of frustration, when Americans are fighting a war that they can neither win nor abandon, "300" and "Shooter" feel like the products of a culture slowly and painfully going mad. ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIII, NO. 6, APRIL 2, 2007. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 19 & 26, June 11 & 18, July 9 & 16, September 3 & 10, and December 24 & 31) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Melissa McCarthy Strome, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing and strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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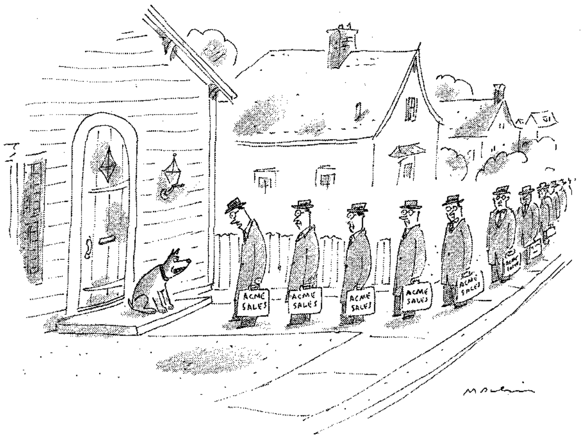
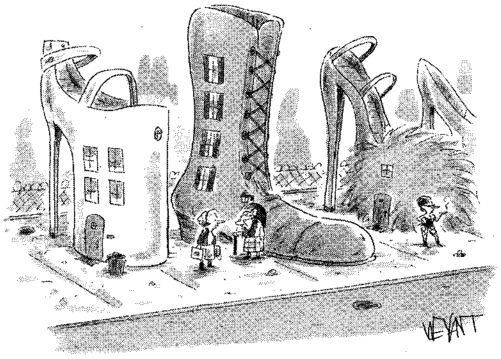
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, April 1st. Finalists in the March 19th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 16th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You don't scare me. I come from a long line of salesmen."
Mike Ford, Brick, N.J.



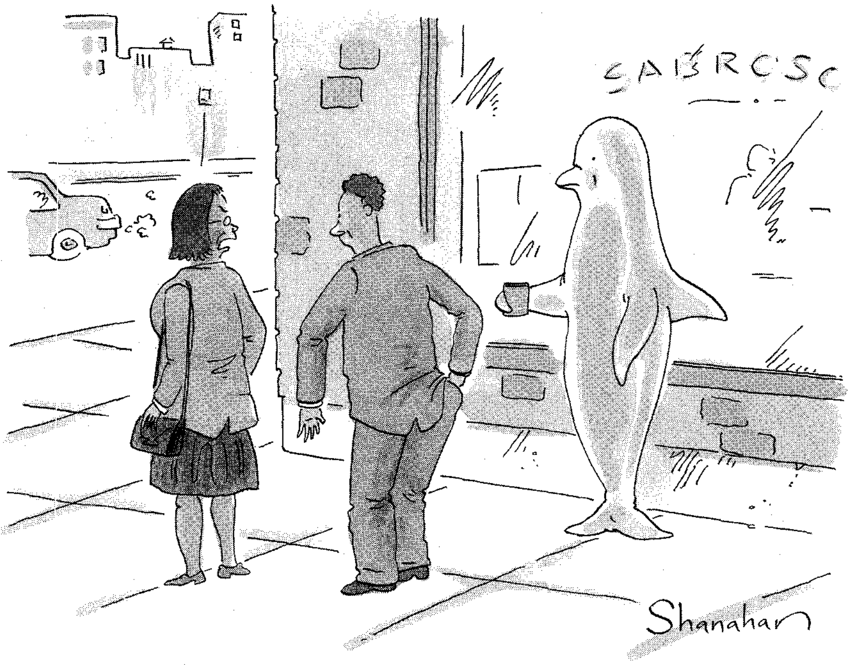
THE FINALISTS

"Don't ask me. I don't know what to do."
Robin Brecker, Philadelphia, Pa.

"Remember back when the worst thing you could catch around here was athlete's foot?"
Charles Beckman, Towson, Md.

"Oh, the rhymes I could tell you."
Jerry Hubert, New Providence, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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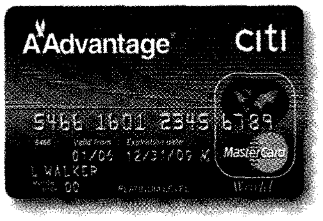

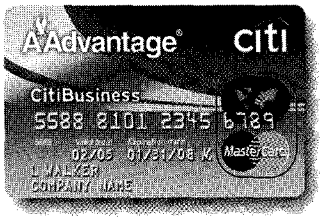

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